







CHEFS D'OEUVRE
DU
ROMAN CONTEMPORAIN

REALISTS

THIS EDITION

DEDICATED TO THE HONOR OF THE

ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

IS LIMITED TO ONE THOUSAND NUMBERED AND REGISTERED
SETS, OF WHICH THIS IS

NUMBER 512

THE REALISTS

ALPHONSE DAUDET

SAPHO: PARISIAN CUSTOMS

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

<http://www.archive.org/details/saphoparisiancus05daud>







Chapter XXV

She saw the blow coming without avoiding it, received it straight in the face, then with a dull murmur of pain, of joy, of victory, she jumped on him, clasped him full in her arms: "My dear, my dear ——, you still love me ——," and they rolled together on the bed.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE
DES CHEFS-D'ŒUVRE
DU ROMAN
CONTEMPORAIN

SAPHO: PARISIAN CUSTOMS

ALPHONSE DAUDET

PRINTED FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY BY
GEORGE BARRIE & SONS, PHILADELPHIA

COPYRIGHTED, 1897, BY G. B. & SON

THIS EDITION OF
SAPHO: PARISIAN CUSTOMS

HAS BEEN COMPLETELY TRANSLATED

BY

T. F. ROGERSON, M. A.

THE ETCHINGS ARE BY

EUGENE ABOT
ALBERT DUVIVIER

AND DRAWINGS BY

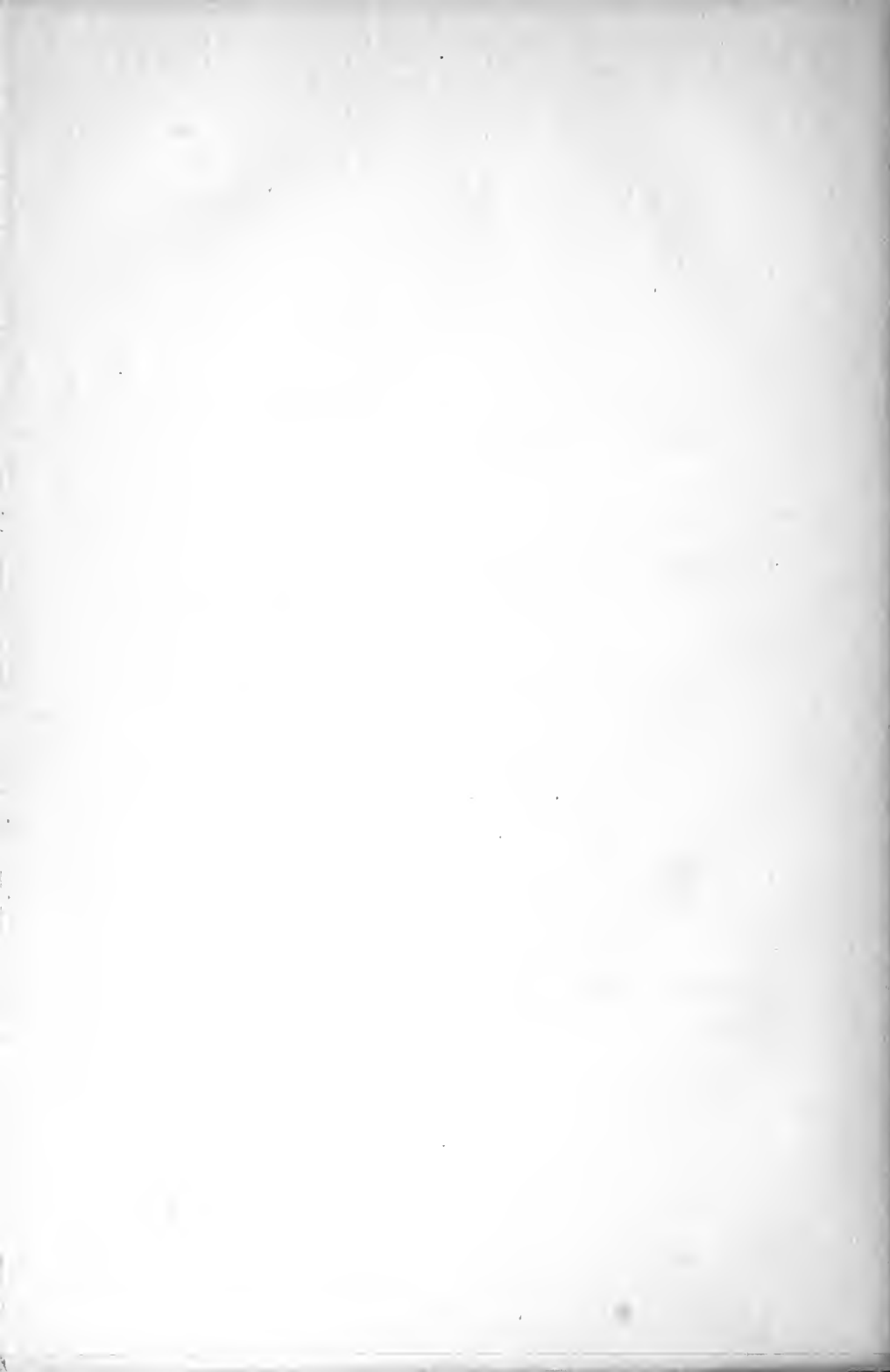
STANISLAS REJCHAN



FOR MY SONS
WHEN THEY ARE TWENTY



SAPHO: PARISIAN CUSTOMS



I

"Look at me, let us see —— I like the color of your eyes —— What is your name?"

"Jean."

"Plain Jean?"

"Jean Gaussin."

"From the South, I understand that —— How old?"

"Twenty-one."

"An artist?"

"No, madame."

"Ah! so much the better ——"

These fragmentary phrases, almost unintelligible amid exclamations, outbursts of laughter, and the dancing airs of a masquerade feast, were exchanged—one night in June—between a piffero and a fellah woman in the greenhouse with palms and tree-ferns that formed the background to Déchelette's studio.

To the urgent questioning of the Egyptian woman, the piffero answered with the ingenuousness of his tender age, with the indifference, the gentleness of a Southerner who had been long without speaking. A stranger to all that world of painters and sculptors, lost as soon as he entered the ball-room by the friend who had brought him, he was waiting about for two hours past, keeping his pretty tanned and sunburnt blonde countenance on the lookout, his hair in close and short curls like the fleece of his costume, till a success, which he scarcely suspected, arose and was whispering around him.

Dancers' shoulders were roughly jostling him, "grinders'" laughter was poking fun at the bagpipes that he wore crosswise and at his mountain jacket, heavy and cumbrous in that summer night. A Japanese girl with superb eyes, with steel daggers holding her lifted "waterfall," was humming enticingly: "Ah! how handsome he is, how handsome he is, the postboy —;" whilst a Spanish novio in white silk lace, passing on the arm of an Apache chief, violently thrust her bouquet of white jessamines under his nose.

He understood nothing of those advances, thought himself extremely ridiculous and took refuge in the fresh shade of the glazed gallery, bordered with a broad divan under verdure. Immediately afterward this woman came and sat down beside him.

Young, beautiful? He would not have known how to say so — From the long blue woolen frock in which her form undulated, emerged two round and fine arms, bare up to the shoulders; and her small hands loaded with rings, her gray eyes wide open and enlarged by the strange iron ornaments falling from her brow, made up a harmonious whole.

An actress, no doubt. Many of them came to Déchelette's; and this thought was not calculated to put him at his ease, persons of that sort making him very much afraid. She spoke to him quite close, one elbow on her knee, her head leaning on her hand with grave sweetness, somewhat weary. "From the South, truly? — And hair as fair as that! — That is something extraordinary."

And she wanted to know how long he had been living in Paris, if that consulship examination for

which he was preparing was very difficult, if he knew many people and how he felt at the Déchelette evening-party, in the Rue de Rome, so far from his Latin quarter.

When he mentioned the name of the student who had brought him —— “La Gournerie —— a relative of the writer —— she knew, no doubt ——,” the expression of that woman’s countenance changed, became suddenly darkened; but he paid no attention to it, being of the age when the eyes shine without seeing anything. La Gournerie had promised him that his cousin would be there, that he would introduce him. “I like his verses so much —— I would be so happy to know him ——”

She had a smile of pity for his candor, a pretty contraction of the shoulders, at the same time removing with her hand the light bamboo leaves and looking into the ball-room to see if she could not point out his big man to him.

At that moment, the feast was sparkling and rolling like a fairy apotheosis. The studio, or rather the hall, for one scarcely worked there, extended to the very top of the house and forming only one

immense room in it, received on its clear, light, summery hangings, its fine straw or gauze spring blinds, its lacquered screens, its many colored window-panes, and on the clusters of yellow roses decking the hearth of a tall Renaissance fireplace, the varied and odd lighting of Chinese, Persian, Moorish, Japanese lanterns, some in pierced iron, set off with ogives like a mosque door, others in paper colored like fruits, others spread out like a fan, having flower, ibis and serpent forms; and all at once large electric flashes, rapid and bluish, made those myriad lights grow pale and hoar-frosted the faces and bare shoulders with moonlight, the whole phantasmagoria of stuffs, feathers, spangles, ribbons that were creased in the ball, were staged on the Dutch stairway with a wide balustrade leading to the galleries of the second floor, over which reached the finger-board of the doublebass and the frantic measure of an orchestra leader's baton.

From his place, the young man saw all that through a network of green branches, flowery bindweed that was mixed in the decoration, framed it, and by an optical illusion, threw into the come and

go of the dance, garlands of wistaria on the silver train of a princess dress, put a dracæna leaf on the pretty head of a Pompadour shepherdess; and to him, now, the interest of the spectacle was doubled by the pleasure of learning from his Egyptian the names, all glorious, all known, concealed by those travesties of such amusing variety and fancy.

That kennel-keeper, his short whip in a shoulder strap, was Jadin; whilst a little farther on, that country pastor's threadbare cassock disguised old Isabey, made taller by the use of cards in his buckled shoes. Old man Corot was smiling under the enormous visor of an Invalides helmet. She also pointed out to him Thomas Couture as a bull-dog, Jundt as a convict jailer, Cham as a bird of the isles.

And some historical and grave costumes, a plumed Murat, a Prince Eugène, a Charles I., worn by quite young painters, clearly marked the difference between the two generations of artists; the last comers, serious, cold, Bourse folks' heads grown old with those special wrinkles that are furrowed by money considerations, the others more like idling boys, "grinders," noisy and unrestrained.

Despite his fifty-five years and the palms of the *Institut*, Caoudal the sculptor, as a hussar in barracks, his arms bare, with his Herculean biceps muscles, a painter's palette beating on his long legs in the guise of a sabretasche, was wabbling as a lone cavalier of the time of La Grande Chaumière in front of the musician De Potter, who as a muezzin is making a feast, his turban crosswise, mimicking the belly-dance and screaming the "la Allah, il Allah," in a treble voice.

They surrounded those illustrious merry-makers with a wide circle of resting dancers; and in the first rank, Déchelette, the master of the house, was frowning with his small eyes under a tall Persian cap, his nose in Kalmuk style, his beard turning gray, happy at the gayety of the others and amusing himself unboundedly, without his appearing in it.

The engineer Déchelette, a figure of the artistic Paris of ten or twelve years ago, very boon, very rich, with a slight fancy for art and that free gait, that contempt for opinion which is derived from a life of travel and celibacy, had then the contract for a railroad from Tauris to Teheran; and each year,

to make up for ten months of fatigue, nights under a tent, feverish gallopings across sands and marshes, he came to spend the very warm season in that house in the Rue de Rome, built according to his own plans, furnished as a summer palace, where he gathered men of wit and pretty girls, asking civilization to give him in a few weeks the essence of all that there is that is elevating and savory.

“Déchelette has arrived.” This was the news of the studios, as soon as they had seen the immense ticking spring blind on the glazed front of the house rise like a theatre curtain. That meant that the feast was beginning and that they were going to have its music and festivities, dances and roisterings for two months, interrupting the silent torpor of the European Quarter at that time of rustication and sea-bathing.

Personally, Déchelette did not count for nothing in those bacchanalia that were rumbling at his house night and day. That indefatigable merry-maker brought to the pleasure a cold frenzy, a vague, smiling look, as of one narcotized, but of imperturbable tranquillity and lucidity. A most faithful friend,

giving without counting, he had for women the contempt of an Oriental, made up of indulgence and politeness; and of those who came there, attracted by his great fortune and the joyous fancy of the surroundings, not one could boast of having been his mistress for more than a day.

"A good man all the same——," added the Egyptian, who gave this information to Gaussin. Suddenly interrupting herself:

"There is your poet ——"

"Where, then?"

"In front of you, as a village bridegroom ——"

The young man uttered an "Oh!" of disappointment. His poet! That big man, perspiring, shining, displaying heavy graces in the double pointed false collar and flowered Jeannot waistcoat——. The loud despairing exclamations of the *Livre de l'Amour* came to his memory, of the book that he never read without a slight feverish beating; and aloud, mechanically, he murmured:

To give life to thy body's proud marble,
O Sapho, I've spent all the blood in my veins——.

She turned around briskly, with the clanging of her barbarous decking:

“What are you saying there?”

They were verses by La Gournerie; he was astonished at her not knowing them.

“I do not like verses ——,” she remarked in a curt tone; and she remained standing, with frowning brow, looking at the dance and nervously rubbing the beautiful lilac bunches that were hanging in front of her. Then, with the effort of a decision that cost her something: “Good-evening ——,” and she disappeared.

The poor piffero remained transfixed. “What is the matter? What have I said to her ——?” He sought, found nothing, except that he would do well to go to bed. In a melancholy way he picked up his bagpipes and returned to the ball-room, less disturbed by the Egyptian’s departure than by all that multitude through which he must pass to reach the door.

The feeling of his insignificance amid so many illustrious persons made him still more timid. Now they were no longer dancing; some couples here

and there, eager in the last measures of a dying waltz, and among them Caoudal, superb and gigantic, whirling his high head around, with a little knitting-girl, with hair floating to the wind, whom he carried in his red arms.

Through the wide open window at the lower end of the room the faint light stole in on the morning air, shaking the leaves of the palm trees, laying down the candle flames as if to extinguish them. A paper lantern caught fire, sockets burst, and all around the hall the servants installed little round tables as if on café terraces. They were ever supping thus in fours and fives at Déchelette's and at that moment, sympathies were reaching out to one another, were grouping.

There were exclamations, fierce calls, the faubourg "Pil — ouit" answering the "you you you you" in the rattling way of the Eastern girls, and colloquies in a low voice, and voluptuous laughter of women whom men were enticing with a caress.

Gaussin took advantage of the tumult to slip towards the exit, when his friend the student stopped him, perspiring, his eyes like balls, a bottle under

each arm: "But where were you, then ——? I have been looking for you everywhere —— I have a table, women, the little Bachelery of the Bouffes —— As a Japanese girl, remember —— She has sent me to look for you. Come quickly ——" and he started off again, running.

The piffero was thirsty; then the intoxication of the ball tempted him, as well as the pretty face of the little actress who from afar was making signs to him. But a serious and gentle voice murmured near his ear:

"Do not go there ——"

She of a moment ago was there, directly in front of him, dragging him outside, and he followed her unhesitatingly. Why? It was not that woman's attractiveness; he had scarcely looked at her, and the other one down there who was calling him, putting in order the steel daggers of her hair, pleased him much more. But he was obeying a will superior to his own, the impetuous violence of a desire.

"Do not go there ——"

And suddenly both found themselves on the sidewalk of the Rue de Rome. Hacks were waiting in

the dim morning. Sweepers, laborers going to their work were looking at that rumbling and overflowing feast, that masquerade couple, a Shrovetide in the middle of summer.

"To your house, or to mine? ——" she asked. Without clearly understanding why, he thought that at his house it would be better, gave his distant address to the driver; and during the journey, which was long, they spoke little. She was only holding one of his hands between hers, which he felt very small and cold; and, without the chill of that nervous embrace, he might have believed that she was asleep, thrown back in the end of the hack, with the shifting reflection of the blue spring blind on her face.

They stopped in the Rue Jacob, in front of a students' boarding-house. Four flights to ascend, it was high and hard. "Will you let me carry you?" he said, laughing, but quite low, because of the sleeping household. She enveloped him with a slow, derisive and tender look, a look of experience that measured him and clearly said: "Poor little fellow ——"

Then he, with a fine bound, characteristic of his age and of his South, took hold of her, carried her as he would a child, for he was solid and limber, with his skin as fair as that of a girl, and he went up the first story at one breath, happy for that weight which two pretty arms, fresh and bare, attached to his neck.

The second flight was longer, without any relief. The woman gave herself up, made herself heavier in proportion. The iron of her pendants, which at first caressed him with a tickling, was gradually and cruelly entering his flesh.

On the third, he was panting like a piano-mover; breath was failing him whilst she murmured, delighted, her eyelids extended: "Oh! my friend, how good it is —, how good one is —" And the last steps, which he crawled one by one, seemed to him to belong to a giant stairway whose walls, balustrade and narrow windows were turning in an interminable spiral. It was no longer a woman that he was carrying, but something heavy, horrible, that was smothering him, and that at every moment he was tempted to let go, to cast away with wrath, at the risk of a brutal crushing.

Having arrived on the narrow landing: "Already!" she said as she opened her eyes. He was thinking: "At last!——" but could not have said it, quite pale, both his hands on his bursting breast.

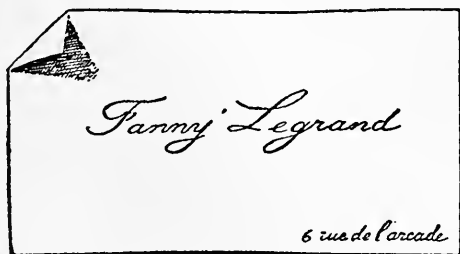
Their whole history, that mounting of a stairway in the gray sadness of the morning.



II

He kept her two days; then she departed, leaving on him an impression of a soft skin and of fine linen. No other information about her than her name, her address and this: "When you want me, call me —, I will be always ready."

Her very small card, elegant, odorous, bore:



He put it in front of his glass between the programme of the last ball at the *Affaires Étrangères* and the illuminated and fancy programme of the Déchelette evening party, his only two worldly

outgoings for the year ; and the remembrance of the woman, remaining a few days around the fire-place in that delicate and light perfume, evaporated at the same time as it did, without Gaussin, serious, industrious, distrusting above everything the enticements of Paris, having had the fancy to renew that little love-affair of an evening.

The ministerial examination would take place in November. There remained to him only three months to prepare for it. After that would come a probation of three or four years in the consular service ; then he would go away somewhere, very far off. This idea of exile did not frighten him ; for a tradition among the Gaussins of Armandy, an old family of Avignon, would have the eldest son follow what they called *the career*, with the example, the encouragement and the moral protection of those who had preceded him. To this provincial, Paris was only the first stay of a very long journey, which kept him from cementing any serious connection in love as well as in friendship.

A week or two after the Déchelette ball, one evening when Gaussin, his lamp lighted, his books

ready on the table, was setting to work, someone knocked timidly; and, the door being opened, a woman appeared in elegant and bright toilet. He recognized her only when she had raised her veil.

“You see, it is I ——, I have returned ——”

Then catching the restless, embarrassed look that he was casting on the work in hand: “Oh! I will not upset you ——, I know what it is ——” She took off her hat, picked up a number of the *Tour du Monde*, installed herself and budged no more, apparently absorbed in her reading; but, each time that he raised his eyes, he met her look.

And truly he needed courage not to take her all at once in his arms, for she was quite tempting and of great charm, with all her little low-browed head, short nose, sensual and good lip, and the supple maturity of her form in that dress of quite Parisian correctness, less frightful to him than her costume of a daughter of Egypt.

Leaving next day very early, she came back several times during the week, and she always entered with the same paleness, the same cold and damp hands, the same voice trembling with emotion.

"Oh! I know well that I am wearying you," she said to him, "that I am fatiguing you. I ought to be more proud — If you believe! — Every morning on my leaving your house, I swear not to come again; then it takes hold of me once more, in the evening, like a madness."

He was looking at her, amused, surprised in his disdain for the woman, by that amorous persistence. Those whom he had known until then, brewery or skating girls, sometimes young and pretty, always left him disgusted with their stupid laughter, with their cooks' hands, with an instinctive and small-talk grossness that made him open the window behind them. In his belief of an innocent, he thought all pleasure girls alike. And so he was astonished at finding in Fanny a gentleness, a reserve truly womanish, with that superiority over the middle-class women whom he met in the provinces at his mother's—with a touch of art, with a knowledge of all things which made chats interesting and varied.

Then she was a musician, accompanied herself on the piano and sang with a somewhat tired, uneven,

but exercised contralto voice, some romance by Chopin or by Schumann, country songs, Berrian, Burgundian or Picardy airs, of which she had quite a collection.

Gaussin, music-mad, that lazy and open-air art in which the people of his country delight, was exalted by the sound in the hours of work, and lulled to rest with it delightfully. From Fanny, it especially enraptured him. He was astonished that she was not in a theatre, and thus learned that she had sung in the Lyrique. "But not long —— I became too weary of it ——"

In her, there was indeed nothing studied, no conventionality of the theatre woman; not the shadow of vanity or of falsehood. Only a certain mystery over her outside life, a mystery kept even in the hours of passion, and into which her lover did not try to penetrate, not feeling either jealous or curious, letting her come at the hour mentioned without even looking at the clock, ignorant yet of the sensation of expectation, those master blows straight in the chest which announce desire and impatience.

From time to time, the summer being very fine that year, they went in quest of all those pretty corners of the environs of Paris, the map of which she knew precisely and in detail. They mingled in the numerous and turbulent departures of the suburban railway stations, breakfasted at some inn skirting on woods or water, shunning only certain too-much frequented places. One day when he proposed to her to go to the Vaux-de-Cernay: "No, no —, not there —, there are too many painters —"

And as to this antipathy for artists, he recalled that it had been the initiation of their love. As he asked the reason for it: "They are," she said, "disordered, complex persons who always relate more things than there are — They have done me a great deal of harm —"

He protested: "Nevertheless, art is beautiful — Nothing like it to embellish, to broaden life."

"You see, my dear, 'tis glorious to be simple and good like you, twenty and to love one's self well —"

Twenty! one would not have given her more, seeing her so lively, always ready, laughing at everything, finding everything good.

One evening, at Saint-Clair, in the Chevreuse valley, they arrived the evening before the feast and did not find a room. It was late, a league's march through the woods at night was necessary to reach the neighboring village. At last, a folding-bed was offered to them, one that was empty at the end of a barn in which masons slept.

"Let us go there," she said, laughing, — "it will remind me of my time of wretchedness."

They passed gropingly between the occupied beds in the large hall roughcast with lime, in which a night-lamp was smoking at the bottom of a niche in the wall; and all night pressed against each other, they smothered their kisses and their laughter, on hearing the snoring, the moaning from fatigue of those companions, whose blouses and heavy working shoes were lying quite close to the Parisian woman's silk dress and fine boots.

At daybreak, a cat-hole was opened in the lower part of the wide portal, a ray of white light grazed the bottom of the beds, the beaten earth, whilst a hoarse voice exclaimed: "Ohé! the gang —" Then in the barn that had become dark again, there

commenced a reluctant and slow bustle, yawnings, stretchings, hoarse coughings, the sad human noises of a gang that is waking up; and heavy, silent, the Limousins went away, one by one, without suspecting that they had slept near a pretty girl.

Behind them, she arose, put on her dress gropingly, and hastily plaited her hair: "Stay there——, I am coming back ——" She returned after a moment with an enormous armful of field flowers bathed with dew. "Now let us sleep ——" she said as she scattered on the bed that odorous freshness of the morning flora which revived the atmosphere around them. And never had she appeared to him so pretty as at that entrance into the barn at day-break laughing, with her light hair floating about her and her wild flowers.

On another occasion, they were breakfasting at Ville-d'Avray in front of the pool. An autumn morning enveloped the calm water with mist, opposite them were the russet woods; and alone in the little restaurant garden, they embraced each other while eating whitebait. All of a sudden, from a rustic pavilion in the branches of the plane-tree at

the foot of which their table was set, a strong and jeering voice called : " Now then, you folk, when you have finished your coddling —— " And sculptor Caoudal's lion face and red moustache leaned in the rustic opening of the chalet.

" I have a good mind to go down and breakfast with you —— I am as weary as an owl in my tree —— "

Fanny did not answer, visibly embarrassed by the meeting ; he, on the contrary, assented very quickly, curious as to the famous artist, flattered at having him at his table.

Caoudal, whose air though coquettish was careless, but in which everything was studied from the white China-crêpe cravat to light up a complexion cut up with wrinkles and pimples, to the vest fitting close to the still slender form and the protruding muscles : Caoudal appeared to him older than at Déchelette's ball.

But what surprised him, and even embarrassed him a little, was the sculptor's tone of intimacy with his mistress. He called her Fanny, spoke familiarly with her. " You know," he said to her, as he

installed his cover on the tablecloth, "I have been a widower for a fortnight. Maria has gone off with Morateur. It left me rather quiet in the beginning — But this morning, on entering the studio, I felt myself dissembling with everything. Impossible to work — Then I gave up my group and I came to breakfast in the country. A sorry idea when one is alone — A little more and I would have dropped tears into my ragoût —"

Then looking at the Provençal whose downy beard and curled hair had the tint of Sauterne in glasses :

"Isn't it fine to enjoy youth! — No danger that she will release him, not that — And what is better, it is contagious — She has as young an appearance as he —"

"That is rude! —" she remarked, laughing; and her laugh bespoke, indeed, seductiveness without age, the youth of the woman who loves and wishes to make herself loved.

"Astonishing —, astonishing —," murmured Caoudal, who was examining her while eating, with a wrinkle of sadness and of desire grimacing in the

Chapter IV

She was thinking only of his suffering and not of the indelicacy of thus giving up the secrets of passion, the pillow confession of all those men who had loved her; and coming closer, still on her knees, she read at the same time as he did, spying him from the corner of her eye.





corner of his mouth. "Recall then, Fanny, a breakfast here —, it was long since, marry! — We were Ezano, Dejoie, the whole band —, you fell into the pond. They dressed you as a man, with the fishkeeper's tunic. It was richly well-becoming to you —"

"I recall nothing —," she remarked coldly, and without lying; for those changing and chance creatures live only in the present hour of their love. No memory of what has preceded, no fear of what may come.

Caoudal, on the contrary, all in the past, unfolded between gulps of Sauterne his exploits of a robust youth, of love and of drinking, country parties, balls at the Opéra, studio charges, battles and conquests. But, on turning towards them with the light of all the flames that he stirred up, ascending to his eyes, he noticed that they were scarcely listening to him, intent as they were on feeding each other with the grapes which they held between their lips.

"Does what I am relating cut rather close? — But if so, I am annoying you — Ah! a dog's name — It is stupid to be old —" He arose

and threw down his napkin. "For me the breakfast, old man Langlois ——," he called out toward the restaurant.

He moved away sadly, dragging his feet, as if gnawed by an incurable malady. For a long time did the lovers follow his tall figure which was stooped under the gold-colored leaves.

"Poor Caoudal ! —— It is true that he is sinking ——," Fanny murmured, in a tone of gentle commiseration ; and as Gaussin was indignant that that Maria, a common girl, a model, could amuse herself with a Caoudal's sufferings and have a preference over the great artist —— for whom ? —— Morateur, a little painter without talent, having in his favor only his youth, she set to laughing : "Ah ! innocent ——, innocent ——," and pulling back his head with both hands on her knees, she fondled him, breathed on him, into his eyes, into his hair, everywhere, like a bouquet.

On the evening of that day, Jean for the first time slept at the house of his mistress, who was tormenting him on this subject for three months past : "And indeed, why do you not want to ?"

"I do not know ——, it is inconvenient."

"Since I tell you that I am free, that I am alone ——"

And the fatigue of the country party aiding, she dragged him to the Rue de l'Arcade, quite close to the railroad station. At the entresol of a middle-class house of honest and substantial appearance, an old servant woman in a peasant bonnet, of rude bearing, came to let them in.

"It is Machaume —— Good-day, Machaume ——," said Fanny, springing on her neck. "You know, this is my loved one, my king —— I am bringing him —— Quick, light up everything, make the house beautiful ——"

Jean remained alone in quite a small parlor with arched and low windows draped with the same common blue silk that covered the divans and some lacquered articles of furniture. On the walls, three or four landscapes relieved and lightened the stuff; all bore a dedicatory expression: "To Fanny Legrand," "To my Dear Fanny ——"

On the mantelpiece was a half-size marble of Caoudal's *Sapho*, which is everywhere in bronze,

and which Gaussin from his early childhood had seen in his father's office. And by the glimmer of the only candle placed near the socle, he noticed a resemblance, improved and, as it were, rejuvenated, between that work of art and his mistress. Those lines of the profile, that movement of the form under the drapery, that gradual rounding of the arms clasped about the knees, were known, familiar to him; his eye enjoyed them with the memory of more tender sensations.

Fanny, finding him in contemplation in front of the marble, said to him in a careless way: "There is something of me, is there not? — Caoudal's model resembles me —" And immediately after, she led him into her bedroom, where Machaume gruffly installed two covers on a small table; all the lights going, even to the brackets on the glass door wardrobe, a fine log fire, crackling as if just lighted, flaming under the spark-catcher, the room of a woman who is dressing for the ball.

"I wanted to sup here," she said, laughing —
"we will be the sooner in bed."

Never had Jean seen such coquettish furnishing. The Louis XVI. lamps, the bright muslins of his mother's and his sisters' rooms did not give the slightest idea of that wadded nest, with silk flock, where the woodwork was concealed under delicate satins, where the bed was only a divan larger than the others, spread out on a bottom of white furs.

Delightful, that caress of light, of heat, of blue reflections lengthened out in the beveled glasses, after their course across fields, the shower that they had received, the mud of the furrowed roads under the declining day. But what prevented him from tasting in true provincial style that comfort of meeting, was the servant woman's bad humor, the look of suspicion that she fixed on him, so much so that Fanny dismissed her with a word: "Leave us, Machaume —, we will serve ourselves —" And as the peasant slammed the door on going away: "Pay no attention to her, she thinks I love you too much — She says that I am throwing my life away — To those country people, it is so rapacious! — Her cooking, for example, is worth more than she —, taste for me this dish of hare."

She cut the pie, uncorked the champagne, forgot to serve herself while looking at him eating, at each moment raising to her shoulder the sleeves of an Algerian *gandoura*, of limp and white wool, which she always wore in the house. She thus reminded him of their first meeting at Déchelette's; and pressed together on the same armchair, eating from the same plate, they spoke of that evening.

"Oh! as for me," she said, "as soon as I saw you enter, I desired you — I would have liked to take you, to bring you away all at once, so that the others should not have you — And as for you, what did you think, when you saw me? —"

At first she had caused him fear: then he had felt himself full of confidence, in complete intimacy with her. "In fact," he added, "I never asked you. Why were you so much annoyed? — For two verses by La Gournerie? —"

She had the same frowning of the brow as at the ball, then a gesture of her head: "Stupid things! — speak no more of them —" And with her arms around him: "It was because I was a little afraid, I also —, I tried to get away, to

regain control of myself ——, but I was not able, I shall never be able ——”

“Oh! never.”

“You will see.”

He was satisfied to answer with the skeptical smile of his age, without stopping at the passionate, almost menacing accent with which that “You will see ——” was hurled at him. That womanly embrace was so sweet, so submissive; he firmly believed that he had only a gesture to make in order to get away ——

What was even the use of getting away? He was so happy in the cuddling of that voluptuous room, so delightfully giddy from that breath of a caress on his beating eyelids, heavy with sleep, full of fleeting visions, rusty woods, meadows, gushing mills, their whole day of love in the country ——

In the morning, he was startled out of his sleep by Machaume’s voice calling at the foot of the bed, without the least mystery: “He is there —— he wants to speak to you ——”

“What! he wants? —— I am no longer at home, then! —— then you let him come in ——”

Furious, she bounded, escaped from the room, half-naked, her cambric gown open :

“Do not budge, my friend ——, I am coming back ——” But he paid no attention to her and felt himself at ease only when he had arisen in his turn and was clothed, his feet solid in his boots.

While picking up his garments in the hermetically closed room in which the night-lamp was still lighting up the disorder of the little supper, he heard the sound of a terrible debate deadened by the parlor hangings. A man's voice, at first irritated, then imploring, whose outbursts were crushed in sobs, in tearful acts of weakness, alternated with another voice that he did not recognize all at once, hard and hoarse, loaded with hate and with ignoble words coming to him like a beer-garden dispute between gay girls.

All that amorous luxury was sullied by it, degraded like a bespattering of stains on silk ; and the woman soiled also, to the level of others whom he had previously despised.

She came back panting, plaiting her scattered hair with a fine movement : “Isn't a man stupid who

weeps? —— ” Then seeing him standing, dressed, she uttered an exclamation of rage: “You’ve got up! —— go to bed again —— immediately —— I mean it ——” Suddenly becoming gentle again, and wheedling him with gesture and with voice: “No, no ——, do not leave ——, you cannot go away like that —— In the first place, I am sure that you would not return any more.”

“But if —— Why, then? ——”

“Swear that you are not angry, that you will come again —— Oh! it is because I know you.”

He swore as she desired, but did not go to bed again despite her supplications and reiterated assurance that she was at home, free as to her life, as to her acts. In the end, she seemed to resign herself to seeing him leave, and accompanied him as far as the door, no longer having anything of the mad fawn, quite humble on the contrary, seeking to have herself forgiven.

A long and profound parting caress kept them in the anteroom.

“Then —— when? ——” she asked him, eyes penetrating all the way into eyes. He was going to

answer, to lie, no doubt, in his haste to be outside, when a ring of the bell stopped him. Machaume left her kitchen, but Fanny made a sign to her: "No ——, do not open ——" And they remained there, all three, motionless, without speaking.

They heard a smothered groan, then the rubbing of a letter slipped under the door, and steps going down slowly. "When I told you that I was free ——, there! ——" She passed to her lover the letter that she had just opened, a poor love-letter, very low, very mean, written hastily in pencil on a café table and in which the unhappy man asked pardon for his folly of the morning, acknowledged having no right over her but that which she would see fit to leave him, entreated her with both hands joined that he might not be exiled without return, promising to accept everything, resigned to everything —— but not to lose her, my God! not to lose her ——

"You believe! ——" she said with a poor laugh; and that laugh completed the barring of the heart which she wished to conquer. Jean found her cruel. He did not yet know that the woman who

loves has feelings only for her love, all her intense forces of charity, goodness, pity, devotedness absorbed to the advantage of one being, of one only.

"You are quite wrong in mocking —— This letter is horribly beautiful and heartrending ——" And quite low, in a grave voice, while holding her hands: "Let us see ——, why do you drive him away? ——"

"I no longer want him —— I do not love him."

"Nevertheless, he was your lover —— He made for you that luxury in which you are living, where you have always lived, which is necessary to you."

"My friend," she said in her accent of frankness, "when I did not know you, I found all that very good —— Now it is a fatigue, a shame; I had the heart for it, which sustained me —— Oh! I know, you are going to tell me that as for you it is not serious, that you do not love me —— But I am making my affair of it —— Whether you wish it or not, I will indeed compel you to love me."

He did not answer, agreed to a meeting for the morrow, and fled, leaving some louis with Machaume, the last in his student's purse, in payment

for the dish. As for him, it was now ended. By what right disturb that woman's life, and what could he offer in exchange for what he made her lose?

He wrote this to her that very day, as gently, as sincerely as he could, but he did not acknowledge that, on hearing those sobs of a deceived lover, alternating with her laughter and washerwoman's oaths, after his night of love, he realized that something unwholesome and evil had sprung from their intrigue, from their trifling and pleasant caprice.

In that tall youth, grown up far from Paris, on an open provincial heath, there was a little of the paternal ruggedness, and all the delicateness, all the nervousness of his mother whom he resembled like a portrait. And to defend him against the enticements of pleasure was further added the example of one of his father's brothers, whose irregularities and follies had half ruined their family and put the honor of their name in peril.

Uncle Césaire! With nothing but these two words and the hidden drama that they evoked, one could require of Jean more terrible sacrifices than

that of this little love-affair to which he had never attached importance. Nevertheless, it was harder to break off than he imagined.

Formally dismissed, she returned without being discouraged at his refusals to see her, at the closed door, at the inexorable orders. "I have no pride——," she wrote to him. She watched the hour of his meals at the restaurant, waited for him in front of the café where he read his newspapers. And not a tear, not a scene. If he was in company, she was satisfied with following him, with spying the moment when he remained alone.

"Do you want me, this evening? —— No? —— Then it will be for another time." And she went away with the resigned gentleness of the hawker rebuckling his pack, leaving to him the remorse of his severities and the humiliation of the falsehood that he lisped at each meeting. "The examination quite close —— the time that was wanting —— Afterwards, later on, if she still desired ——" In fact, he counted, as soon as admitted, on taking a month's vacation in the South and on her forgetting him during that time.

Unfortunately, the examination over, Jean fell sick. An attack of quinsy that seized him in the lobby of a ministry, being neglected, became aggravated. He knew no one in Paris, with the exception of a few students from his province, whom his exacting intrigue had alienated and scattered. Besides, more than an ordinary devotedness was needed here, and from the first evening it was Fanny Legrand who installed herself beside his bed, not leaving him for ten days, taking care of him without fatigue, without fear or disgust, adroit as a watching sister, with tender wheedlings that sometimes, at the feverish hours, brought him back to a serious childhood's illness, made him call for his Aunt Divonne, to say: "Thanks, Divonne," when he felt Fanny's hands on his moist brow.

"It is not Divonne ——, it is I ——, I am watching you ——"

She saved him mercenary attentions, awkwardly extinguished fires, diet drinks manufactured in a janitor's lodge; and Jean was far from realizing how alert, ingenious and expeditious were those hands of indolence and lustfulness. At night, she

slept two hours on the divan,—a hotel divan of the Quarter, soft as a bench in a police station.

“But, my poor Fanny, you are then, never going home? ——” he asked her one day. “I am better at present —— Machaume ought to be reassured.”

She commenced to laugh. What a fine time she was having, Machaume and the whole house. They had sold everything, the furniture, the movables, even the bedding. There remained to her the dress that she had on her back and a little fine linen, saved by her housemaid —— If he sent her away now, she would be in the street.



III

“This time, I believe I have found —— Rue d'Amsterdam, opposite the railway station —— Three rooms and a large balcony —— If you wish, we will go and see, after your ministry —— It is high, five flights ——, but you will carry me. It was so good, you remember ——”

And quite amused at this recollection, she was gently rubbing against him, nestling her head on his neck, looking for the old place, her place.

For two, in their house-furnishing, with the manners of the Quarter, those loiterings on the stairway of girls in tatters and in old shoes, those paper partitions behind which other households swarmed, that promiscuousness of keys, of candlesticks, of shoes, life was becoming intolerable. Not to her certainly; with Jean, the roof, the cellar, even the sewer, anything was good to nestle in. But her

lover's delicacy took fright at certain contacts, of which, as a boy, he hardly thought. Those house-keepings of a night were embarrassing him, were dishonoring his people, were causing him a little sadness and the disgust felt for the monkey cage in the Jardin des Plantes, where all the gestures and expressions of human love are grimaced. The restaurant also was wearying him, that repast which it was necessary to go and get twice a day in the Boulevard Saint-Michel, in a large hall crammed with students, pupils of the Beaux-Arts, painters, architects, who without knowing him were acquainted with his appearance, for the year past that he had been eating there.

He blushed—while pushing the door—with all those eyes turned towards Fanny, entered with the aggressive embarrassment of all young men who accompany a woman; and he also feared meeting one of his chiefs in the ministry or someone from his country. Then there was the question of economy.

“How dear it is! ——” she said each time, taking up and commenting on the little bill for dinner.

"If we were in our own home, I would have made the house go three days for that price."

"Well, what is preventing us?——" And they set out in quest of an apartment.

That is the hidden snare. All are taken by it, the best, the most honest, by that instinct of cleanliness, that taste of the home that has been instilled into them by family education and the warmth of the fireside.

The apartments in the Rue d'Amsterdam were rented immediately and found charming, in spite of their rooms in a row that opened,—the kitchen and the dining-room on a damp backyard from which ascended from an English tavern odors of rinsings and of chlorine,—the bedroom on the sloping and noisy street, shaken day and night by the joltings of the wagons, trucks, hacks, omnibuses, the whistlings of arrivals and departures, all the hubbub of the Gare de l'Ouest opposite them with its glass roofs of the color of dirty water. The advantage was to know that the train was at one's door, and Saint-Cloud, Ville-d'Avray, Saint-Germain, the green stations on the banks of the Seine

almost under their terrace. For they had a terrace, broad and commodious, which kept from the munificence of the former tenants a zinc tent painted to imitate striped ticking, streaming and sad under the battering of the winter rains, but where one would be all right in summer dining in the open air, as in a mountain chalet.

They were taken up with the furniture. Jean having informed his folks of his plan of installation, Aunt Divonne, who was, as it were, the superintendent of the house, sent the necessary money; and her letter announced at the same time the coming arrival of a wardrobe, of a chest of drawers, and of a large cane armchair, taken from the *Chambre du vent* for the Parisian's benefit.

That room, which he saw again at the lower end of a corridor of Castelet, always uninhabited, the closed shutters fastened by a bar, the door shut and locked, was condemned, by its exposure, to the gusts of the northwest wind which made it creak like a lighthouse room. They packed out-of-date things in it, what each generation of inhabitants relegated to the past to make way for new acquisitions.

Ah! if Divonne had known for what strange siestas the cane armchair would serve, and what surah skirts and pantalettes would fill the drawers of the Empire chest — But Gaussin's remorse in this regard was lost in the thousand little joys of the installation.

It was so amusing, after office work, at dusk, to go out on long rounds, clasped arm in arm, and to go away into some faubourg street to choose a dining-room set,—sideboard, table and six chairs, or flowered cretonne curtains for the window and the bed. He accepted everything with his eyes shut; but Fanny looked for two, tried the chairs, slid the leaves of the table, showed a dealer's experience.

She knew the houses where they had at manufacturers' prices, a complete kitchen outfit for a small household, the four iron saucepans, the fifth enameled for the morning chocolate; copper, never, it takes too long to clean. Six metal covers with the soup-ladle and two dozen English delft plates, solid and cheerful, all that counted, prepared, packed like a little doll dinner-set. As regards the cloths, napkins, toilet and table linen, she knew a dealer, the

representative of a large Roubaix factory, at whose place one paid so much a month ; and always lying in wait for bargains, in quest of those closings-out, of those shipwreck remains which Paris is continually bringing in the foam of its shores, she discovered in the Boulevard de Clichy a superb bed, second-hand but almost new, and wide enough for the ogre's seven girls to lie in it in a row.

He also, on returning from the office, looked out for bargains ; but he concluded on nothing, not knowing how to say no, or to go away with his hands empty. Having entered a second-hand dealer's to buy an old oil-cruet that she had pointed out to him, he brought away, in place of that article, already sold, a parlor lustre with pendants, quite useless, as they had no parlor.

"We will put it in the verandah ——," Fanny said, to console him.

And the happiness of taking measures, the discussions on the placing of a piece of furniture ; and the exclamations, the wild bursts of laughter, the arms thrown upward when they perceived that in spite of all precautions, in spite of the very

complete list of the indispensable purchases, there was always something forgotten.

Thus the sugar-grater. Does one imagine that they were starting housekeeping without a sugar-grater? ——

Then, everything bought and put in place, the curtains hung, a wick for the new lamp, what a fine evening for them that of the installation, the minute review of the three rooms before lying down, and how she was laughing while lighting him as he was locking the door.

“Another turn, another —— fasten surely ——
Let us be truly at home ——”

Then it was a new life, delightful. On leaving his work, he returned quickly, in a hurry to be at rest, in slippers at their fireside. And in the dark splashing of the street, he was picturing to himself their bedroom lit up and warm, made pleasant by his old provincial furniture which Fanny was treating in advance as mere rubbish, but which she found to consist of pretty, old things; the wardrobe especially, a Louis XVI. gem, with its painted panels, representing Provençal feasts, shepherds in flowered

jackets, dances to flute and tambourine. The presence, familiar to his childhood's eyes, of these antiques out of fashion, reminded him of the paternal home, and consecrated his new interior whose happiness he was to taste.

As soon as his ring was heard, Fanny arrived, neat, coquettish, "on the bridge," as she said. Her black woolen dress, quite simple, but cut after a good maker's pattern, showed the simplicity of a woman of good taste, the sleeves were tucked up, and she wore a large white apron; for she did their cooking herself and was satisfied with a housemaid for the heavy jobs that chap the hands or deform them.

She understood it very well, knew a multitude of recipes, Northern or Southern dishes, as varied as her repertory of popular songs which, the dinner over, the white apron hung up behind the closed kitchen door, she intoned with her contralto voice, strained and passionate.

Below, the street was roaring, rolling as a torrent. The cold rain was pattering on the veranda zinc; and Gaussin, his feet near the fire, spread out in his armchair, was looking opposite at the windows of

the railway station, at the stooping employees writing under the white light of large reflectors.

He was well, was letting himself be lulled. In love? No; but grateful for the love with which she was enveloping him, for that unwavering tenderness. How had he been able to deprive himself so long of that happiness, in the dread—at which he now laughed—of a bewitching, of some shackle or other? Was it that his life was not more proper than when he was going from girl to girl risking his health?

No danger for later on. In three years, when he would go away, the breaking off would take place all alone and without shock. Fanny was forewarned; they spoke of it together, as of death, of a remote, but unavoidable fatality. There remained the great grief that they would feel at his house on learning that he was not living alone, the wrath of his father, who was so strict and so prompt.

But how could they know? Jean saw no one in Paris. His father, "the consul," as they said down there, was kept busy all the year in superintending the very considerable domain that he was making worth something and with his stern struggles with

the vine. The mother, powerless, could not take a step or make a movement without aid, leaving to Divonne the directing of the house, the care of the two little twin sisters, Marthe and Marie, whose double birth, by surprise, had forever taken away her active strength. As regards Uncle Césaire, Divonne's husband, he was an overgrown boy whom they did not allow to travel alone.

And Fanny now knew the whole family. When he received a letter from Castelet, at the end of which the twin girls had put a few lines of their big writing with their little fingers, she read it over his shoulder, she entered into his feelings. Of her own life he knew nothing, did not inform himself. He had the fine unconscious egotism of his youth, no jealousy, no uneasiness. Full of his own life, he let it overflow, thought aloud, gave himself up, whilst the other remained mute.

Thus the days, the weeks, passed by in a happy quietude, disturbed for a moment by a circumstance that moved them a great deal, but differently. She thought she was pregnant and told him so with such joy that he could but share it. In reality,

he was afraid. A child, at his age! — What would he do with it? — Should he acknowledge it? — And what a pledge between that woman and him, what a future complication!

Suddenly, the chain appeared to him, heavy, cold and forged. At night, he slept no more than she did; and side by side in their large bed, they were dreaming with their eyes open, a thousand leagues from each other.

Fortunately, this false alarm was not again renewed, and they resumed their course of a peaceful life, exquisitely close. Then the winter ended, the true sun at last returned, their house was further embellished, enlarged by the terrace and the tent. In the evening, they dined there, under the green-tinted sky, which echoed back the noisy flight of the swallows.

The street sent up its warm whiffs and all the noises of the neighboring houses; but the least breath of air was for them, and they forgot themselves for hours, their knees interlocked, seeing nothing besides. Jean recalled such nights on the bank of the Rhone, dreamt of far-off consulates in

very warm countries, of the decks of departing vessels where the breeze would have that long breath with which the tent-curtain was shuddering. And when an invisible caress murmured on his lips: "Do you love me? ——" he was ever returning from very far away to answer: "Oh! yes, I love you ——" That is what it is to take them so young; they have too many ideas in their head.

On the same balcony, separated from them by an iron railing garlanded with creeping flowers, another couple cooed, Monsieur and Madame Hettéma, married people, very stout, whose kisses resounded like slaps on the cheek. Marvelously matched, in a conformity of age, of taste, of heavy figure, it was touching to hear those lovers at the end of youth, singing quite low a duo of old sentimental romances, while leaning on the balustrade ——

But I hear him well as he sighs in the shade;
A beautiful dream, ah! let me sleep.

They were pleasing to Fanny, she would have liked to know them. Sometimes even the neighboring woman and she, exchanged over the darkened

iron of the railing, a smile of women in love, and happy; but the men, as always, were more reserved, and they did not speak to each other.

Jean was returning from the Quai d'Orsay one afternoon, when he heard himself called at the corner of the Rue Royale. It was a wonderful day, with a warm light in which Paris was blooming at that boulevard turning, which in a fine sunset, towards the hour for the Bois, has not its equal in the world.

"Sit down there, pretty youth, and drink something —, it pleases my eyes to look at you."

Two big arms had clasped him, thrust from the tent of a café invading the sidewalk with its three rows of tables. He yielded, flattered at hearing around him that public of provincials, of strangers, with striped jackets and round caps, curiously whispering Caoudal's name.

The sculptor, seated at table in front of an *absinthe* that suited his military cut and his officer's rosette, had near him the engineer Déchelette, who had arrived the day before, ever the same, tanned and yellow, his high cheekbones forcing upward his

good, little eyes, his gluttonous nose sniffing Paris. As soon as the young man was seated, Caoudal pointing to him with comic eagerness :

"Isn't that animal handsome — To say that I was once his age and that I frizzed like that — Oh! youth, youth —"

"Always, that?" Déchelette remarked, with a smile saluting his friend's fancy.

"My dear fellow, do not laugh — All that I have, all that I am, medals, crosses, the *Institut*, the lot of it, I would give for that hair and that sunny complexion —" Then, turning on Gaussin with his abrupt bearing :

"And Sapho, what are you doing with her? — One no longer sees her."

Jean stared vacantly, without understanding.

"You are, then, no longer with her?" And, in the face of his amazement, Caoudal added in a tone of impatience: "Sapho, let us see — Fanny Legrand — Ville-d'Avray —"

"Oh! it is over, a long time ago —"

How did this lie come to him? By a sort of shame, of uneasiness, at that name of Sapho given

to his mistress; the embarrassment of speaking of her with other men, perhaps also the desire of learning things that people would not have said to him without that.

"Come! Sapho —— She is still about?" Déchelette asked in a distraught way, quite enthusiastic at again seeing the Madeleine steps, the flower market, the long line of the boulevards between two rows of green bouquets.

"You do not recall her, then, at your house, last year! —— She was superb in her fellah tunic —— And on that autumn morning, on which I found her breakfasting with this handsome youth at Langlois's, you would have said that she was a bride of a fortnight."

"How old is she, then? —— From the time that one has known her ——" Caoudal raised his head to look: "How old? —— how old? —— Let us see, seventeen in '53, when she sat for my figure ——, we are in '73. So, count." Suddenly his eyes lit up: "Ah! if you had seen her, twenty years ago ——, tall, fine, with her arched mouth, her firm brow —— Arms, shoulders, still a little

thin, but that well became Sapho's burning ——
And the woman, the mistress! —— What there
was in that ready flesh, what one took from that
touchstone, from that keyboard in which a note was
not wanting —— The whole lyre! —— as La
Gournerie said."

Jean, very pale, asked: "Was he her lover, that
man also? ——"

"La Gournerie? —— I think so indeed, I have
suffered enough from it —— Four years did we
live together as husband and wife, four years did I
brood over her, did I exhaust myself to suffice for
all her caprices —— singing, piano, riding masters,
do I know? —— And when I had well polished
her, handled her, shaped her as a fine stone, on her
leaving the stream from which I had picked her up
one night, before the Ragache ball, that beauish
finisher of rhymes came and took her away from
my house, from the friendly table at which he sat
every Sunday!"

He blew very hard, as if to drive away that old
love rancor that was still vibrating in his voice, then
he continued, more calmly:

“ Besides, his rascality did not profit him — Their three years of housekeeping was a hell. That poet with wheedling airs was whimsical, wicked, a maniac. They beat each other, one ought to see ! — When one went to their house, one found her with a bandage over her eye, his face furrowed with scratches — But the fine thing was when he wanted to leave her. She clung like a moth, followed him, burst his door open, waited for him, lying across his door-mat. One night, in the depth of winter, she remained five hours downstairs at La Farcy’s when the whole company had gone up — A pity ! — But the elegiac poet remained implacable, until the day when, in order to get rid of her, he set the police in motion. Ah ! a nice gentleman — And as a last resort, thanks to that pretty girl who had given to him the best of her youth, of her intellect and of her flesh, he emptied on her head a volume of hateful, beslabbering verses, imprecations, lamentations, the *Livre de l’Amour*, his finest book — ”

Motionless, his back stretched, Gaussin was listening, drawing in by quite little sips through a long

straw, the iced drink served in front of him. Some poison, most assuredly, that they had poured out for him there, and which was freezing him from heart to entrails.

He was shivering in spite of the splendid weather, saw in the dim distance shadows that were going and coming, a sprinkling cart stopped in front of the Madeleine, and that intercrossing of carriages rolling on the soft ground as silently as on padding. No more sound in Paris, nothing more than was being said at that table. Now Déchelette was speaking, it was he who was pouring out the poison :

“What an atrocious thing these ruptures are ——” And his quiet and mocking laugh assumed an expression of mildness, of infinite pity —— “They lived for years together, slept against each other, mingled their dreams, their perspiration. They have said everything, given everything to each other. They have assumed habits, manners of being, of speaking, even traits of each other. They stick to each other from head to foot —— In short, glued together —— Then suddenly they part, they tear themselves away —— How do they do? How

have they that courage? — As for me, never could I do it — Yes, deceived, outraged, soiled with ridicule and with mud, the woman would weep, would say to me: ‘Stay —,’ I could not go away — And that is why, when I take one of them, it is never but for the night — Not a to-morrow, as old France said —, or then marriage. It is definitive and more proper.”

“No to-morrow —, no to-morrow — You speak of it at your ease. There are women whom one keeps but for a night — That one, for example.”

“I did not give her a minute’s grace —,” Déchelette remarked with a placid smile which the poor lover found hideous.

“Then it is because you are not her type, without which — She is a girl, when she loves, she clings — She has the taste for housekeeping — Moreover, no chance in her installations. She takes up with Dejoie, the romancer; he dies — She passes to Ezano, he gets married — Afterwards comes the handsome Flamant, the engraver, the former model, — for she always had her cap set

for talent or for beauty,—and you know his terrible adventure ——”

“What adventure? ——” Gaussin asked, his voice stifled; and he again set himself to drawing through his straw, while listening to the love drama that was exciting Paris some years ago.

The engraver was poor, mad for that woman; and from fear of being dropped, to keep up his splendor he made counterfeit bank notes. Discovered almost immediately, locked up with his mistress, he got out of it with ten years' confinement, she with six months' seclusion at Saint-Lazare, her innocence having been established.

And Caoudal reminded Déchelette—who had followed the trial—how pretty she was in her little Saint-Lazare bonnet, and swaggering, not at all whimpering, faithful to her man until the end —— And her answer to that old pickle of a president, and the kiss which she sent to Flamant over the gendarmes' three-cornered hats, while calling out to him in a voice that would move a stone: “Don't get weary, my love —— The fine days will return, we will love each other again! ——” All the same,

it had disgusted her a little with housekeeping, the poor girl.

"Since, launched upon the *chic* world, she has taken lovers by the month, by the week, and never artists — Oh! artists, she has a dread of them — I was the only one, I well believe, whom she would have continued to see — At long intervals, she came to smoke her cigarette in the studio. Then I spent months without hearing her spoken of, until the day when I found her again in the act of breakfasting with this fine youth and eating grapes from his mouth. I said to myself: 'There is my Sapho turned up again!'"

Jean could listen to no more of it. He felt himself dying of all that absorbed poison. After the cold of a little while ago, a burning was torturing his chest, was mounting to his buzzing head and almost breaking out like white-heated sheet-iron. He crossed the highway, staggering under the wheels of the carriages. Drivers were calling out. What were they about, those imbeciles?

While passing along the Madeleine steps, he was disturbed by an odor of heliotrope, his mistress's

favorite odor. He hurried his pace so as to fly from it, and, furious, distracted, he was thinking aloud: "My mistress; yes, a pretty mass of filth — Sapho, Sapho — To say that I have lived for a year with that! —" He repeated the name madly, recalling having seen it in the minor newspapers, among other girls' nicknames, in the grotesque Gotha-Almanach of gallantry: Sapho, Cora, Caro, Phryn , Jeanne de Poitiers, Le Phoque —

And with the five letters of her abominable name, that woman's whole life passed before his eyes like a rushing sewer — Caoudal's studio, the patterings at La Gournerie's, the night doings in front of paltry lodgings or on the poet's door-mat — Then the handsome engraver, the forgeries, the assize court —, and the little prison bonnet that became her so well, and the kiss thrown to her counterfeiter: "Do not get weary, my love —" My love! the same name, the same caress as for him — What shame! — Ah! he was going neatly to sweep those soilings from himself — And ever that heliotrope odor that was pursuing

him into a twilight of the same pale lilac as the quite small flower.

Suddenly, he noticed that he was still pacing the market as though on a boat bridge. He resumed his course, in one stretch arrived in the Rue d'Amsterdam, fully decided on driving away that woman from his house, on throwing her out on the stairway without an explanation, while spitting in her face the insult to her name. At the door he hesitated, reflected, took a few more steps. She was going to cry, to sob, to let loose through the house her entire sidewalk vocabulary, as down there, in the Rue de l'Arcade —

To write? — yes, it was that, it was of more avail to write, to settle his account with her in four words, quite ferocious ones. He entered an English tavern, deserted and gloomy under the gas that they were lighting, sat down at a sticky table, near the only eater, a death's-head girl who was devouring smoked salmon, without drinking. He asked for a pint of ale, did not touch it and began a letter. But too many words were rushing through his head, all wanting to come out at the same time,

and which the decomposed and clotted ink traced slowly at its will.

He tore up two or three commencements, left at last without writing, when, near him, and in quite a low voice, a full and voracious mouth timidly asked him: "You are not drinking? — someone may? —" He made an affirmative sign. The girl threw herself on the pint and emptied it with one violent gulp which revealed that unfortunate one's distress, having in her pocket exactly the wherewith to satiate her hunger without moistening it with a little beer. Pity overcame him, appeased him, suddenly enlightened him on the miseries of a woman's life; and he set himself to judging more humanely, to reasoning on her misfortune.

After all, she had not lied to him; and if he knew nothing of her life, it was because he had never cared about it. With what did he reproach her? — Her time at Saint-Lazare? — But since they had acquitted her, borne almost in triumph on leaving — Then, what? Other men before him? — Was it that he did not know it? — What reason

for more ill-will, because those lovers' names were known, famous, because he could meet them, speak to them, look at their portraits on shop-fronts? Should he make it a crime for her to have preferred them?

And in the very innermost of his being there arose an evil pride, unavowable, in sharing her with those great artists, in saying to himself that they had found her beautiful. At his age one is never sure, one does not know clearly. One loves woman, intrigue; but eyes and experience are wanting, and the young lover who shows you a portrait of his mistress is seeking for a look, an approbation that reassures him. Sapho's figure seemed to him taller, encircled by a halo, since he knew she had been sung by La Gournerie, fixed by Caoudal in marble and bronze.

But suddenly seized again with anger, he left the bench on which his meditation had thrown him, on the outer boulevard, in the midst of children's cries, of the gossiping of the workmen's wives on that dusty, June evening; and he took again to walking, to speaking aloud, furiously — Pretty, the Sapho

bronze — trade bronze, which has been trailed everywhere, common as a street-organ tune, as that word Sapho which, by force of rolling down the ages, has become filthy with unclean legends on her first grace, and from the name of a goddess has become the label of a malady — How disgusting all that was, my God! —

He went away thus, in turn appeased or furious, with that eddy of conflicting ideas and feelings. The boulevard darkened, became deserted. An unsavory bitterness lay in the warm air; and he recognized the gate of the large cemetery to which he had come the year before to attend in all his youth at the inauguration of a bust by Caoudal on Dejoie's tomb, the romancer of the Latin quarter, the author of *Cenderinette*. Dejoie, Caoudal! The strange accent that these names assumed to him within the past two hours! and how it seemed to him lying and lugubrious, the history of the girl student and of her little household, now that he knew its sad reverse side, that he had learned through Déchelette the frightful surname given to those sidewalk marriages.

All that shadow, darker in the surroundings of death, frightened him. He retraced his steps, brushing against blouses that were roaming around, silent as night wings, dirty skirts at the door of paltry lodgings whose unclean windows were as large magic lantern lights in which couples were reflected, were embracing — What o'clock? — He felt himself broken, like a recruit at the end of the march; and of his benumbed sorrow, fallen into his legs, there remained to him only the weariness. Oh! to lie down, to sleep — Then on reawakening, coldly, without wrath, he would say to the woman: "There — I know who you are — It is not your fault or mine; but we can no longer live together. Let us separate —" And to put himself beyond the reach of her following him, he would go and embrace his mother and his sisters, would cast to the wind of the Rhone, to the free and vivifying northwest wind, the sullyings and the fright of his bad dream.

She had gone to bed, weary of waiting, and was asleep directly under the lamp, a book open on the

cover in front of her. His approach did not wake her up; and standing near the bed, he looked at her curiously as at a new woman, a stranger whom he had found there.

Beautiful, oh ! beautiful, the arms, the throat, the shoulders, of a fine, solid amber, without a stain or a flaw. But on those reddened eyelids,—perhaps the romance that she was reading, perhaps restlessness, expectation,—on those features distended in repose and which were no longer sustained by the keen desire of the woman who wishes to be loved, what lassitude, what avowals ! Her age, her history, her debauches, her caprices, her stickings, and Saint-Lazare, blows, tears, terrors, everything was seen, was displayed ; and the violet contusions of pleasure and of insomnia, and the fold of disgust depressing the lower lip, used up, worn out as a fountain-step on which the whole community has come to drink, and the nascent bloating that loosens the flesh for the wrinkles of old age.

This treason of sleep, the silence of death enveloping it, was grand, was sinister ; a battlefield at night,

with all the horror that is seen and that which one imagines in the vague movements of shadows.

And suddenly there came to the poor youth a heavy, a stifling desire to weep.



IV

They were finishing dinner, the window open, to the long screaming of the swallows saluting the decline of light. Jean was not speaking, but he was going to speak and ever of the same cruel thing that was haunting him, and with which he was torturing Fanny, since the meeting with Caoudal. She, seeing his eyes downcast, the falsely indifferent air that he assumed towards new questions, guessed and anticipated him :

“Listen, I know what you are going to say to me —, spare us, I entreat you —, one gets exhausted at last — Since it is dead, all that, since I love only you, since there is no longer but you in the world —”

“If it were dead, as you say, all that past —”
And he looked into the bottom of her lovely eyes of a cold gray and changing at each impression —

"You will not keep things that recall it to you ——, yes, up there in the wardrobe ——"

The gray became softened with a shade of black :

"You know, then?"

All that mass of love-letters, of portraits, those gallant and glorious archives saved from so many ruptures, it was necessary, then, to get rid of them!

"At least, will you believe me afterwards?"

And at an incredulous smile that distrusted her, she ran to look for the lacquered box whose chiseled ironwork between the delicate piles of her linen had so much puzzled her lover for some days past.

"Burn, tear up, it is yours ——"

But he was in no hurry to turn the little key, was looking at the cherry trees with red mother-of-pearl fruits and the flights of storks encrusted on the covering which he made open suddenly —— All the forms, all the writings, colored papers with gilt headings, old notes grown yellow and broken at the foldings, scribblings in pencil on note-book leaves, visiting cards, in heaps, without order, as if in a drawer often rummaged and upset, in which he himself now buried his trembling hands ——

"Pass them to me. I will burn them before your eyes."

She spoke feverishly, crouched in front of the fireplace, a lighted candle on the floor beside her.

"Give ——"

But he: "No ——, wait ——" And lower, as if ashamed: "I would like to read ——"

"Why? you are going to do yourself further harm ——"

She was thinking only of his suffering and not of the indelicacy of thus giving up the secrets of passion, the pillow confession of all those men who had loved her; and coming closer, still on her knees, she read at the same time as he did, spying him from the corner of her eye.

Ten pages, signed La Gournerie, 1861, in a long and feline writing, in which the poet, sent to Algeria for the official and lyrical report of the journey of the Emperor and Empress, gave to his mistress a glowing description of the festivities.

Algiers overflowing and swarming, a veritable Bagdad of the *Arabian Nights*; the whole of Africa rushing thither, heaped around the city, beating at

its gates as if to break them in, like a simoom. Caravans of negroes and of camels loaded with gum, hide tents set up, an odor of human musk on all that apishness that was bivouacking on the sea-shore, was dancing at night around large fires, went away each morning before the arrival of the Southern chiefs like to Magi kings with oriental pomp, the discordant music, reed flutes, hoarse little drums, the *goum* surrounding the tricolored standard of the Prophet; and behind, led in leash by negroes, the horses intended as a present for the *Emberour*, clad in silk, caparisoned with silver, at each step shaking bells and embroideries —

The poet's genius made all that living and present; the words shone on the page, like those unmounted stones that are judged by jewelers on paper. Truly she might be proud, the woman at whose knees one threw those riches. It was evident that she was loved, since, despite the curiosity of those festivities, the poet was dreaming only of her, was dying because he could not see her:

“Oh! to-night, I was with you on the large divan in the Rue de l'Arcade. You were naked,

you were mad, you were crying from joy under my caresses, when I awoke with a start, rolled in a rug on my terrace, in the middle of a starry night. The muezzin's call arose from a neighboring minaret like a clear and limpid fuse, voluptuous rather than praying, and it was you that I still heard while coming out of my dream ——”

What evil force was driving him, then, to continue his reading in spite of the horrible jealousy that was whitening his lips, was contracting his hands? Gently, wheedlingly, Fanny was trying to take the letter from him again; but he read it to the end, and after that one, another, then another, letting them fall as he read them with a contemptuous, indifferent detachment, without looking at the flame that was kindling in the fireplace with the great poet's lyric and passionate effusions. And sometimes, in the overflowing of that love, exaggerated in the African temperature, the lover's lyricism was stained with some gross guard-house obscenity which would have surprised and scandalized the mundane female readers of the *Livre de l'Amour*, of a refined spiritualism, immaculate as the silver peak of the Jungfrau.

Miseries of the heart! It was at these passages especially that Jean stopped, at these sullyings of the page, without suspecting the nervous twitches that each time agitated his countenance. He even had the courage to titter at that postscript which followed the glowing narrative of an Aïssaouas feast: "I am re-reading my letter —, truly there are things not bad; put it aside for me, I will be able to make use of it —"

"A gentleman who let nothing lie about!" he remarked, as he passed to another sheet of the same writing in which, in the icy tone of a man of business, La Gournerie claimed a collection of Arab songs and a pair of rice-straw slippers. It was the winding up of their love. Ah! he had known how to go away, he was strong, he was.

And, without stopping, Jean continued to drain that swamp from which ascended a warm and unwholesome breath. Night having come, he had put the candle on the table, and was running over very short notes, illegibly traced as if with a bodkin by fingers that were too thick and that at every moment, in an abruptness of desire or of wrath,

pierced and tore the paper. The early times of an intrigue with Caoudal, meetings, suppers, country parties, then broils, suppliant returns, cryings, ignoble and base workingman's insults, suddenly interrupted by buffoonery, by ridiculous expressions, by sobbing reproaches, by all the weakness laid bare of the great artist in the presence of breaking off and abandonment.

The fire took it, stretched it out in large, red flames in which smoked and shriveled the flesh, the blood, the tears of a man of genius; but what mattered it to Fanny, now wholly surrendered to the young lover, whom she was watching over, whose ardent fever was burning her through their garments. He had just found a pen and ink portrait signed Gavarni, with this dedication: *To my loved Fanny Legrand, in an inn of Dampierre, one day when it was raining.* An intellectual and sorrowful head, with hollowed eyes, somewhat bitter and devastated.

"Who is it?"

"André Dejoie — I prize it because of the signature —"

He said : " Keep it, you are free," so constrained, so unhappy, that she took the sketch, threw it into the fire in tatters, whilst he was buried in the romancer's correspondence, a heart-rending continuation, dated from winter seaside resorts, from watering-places, where the writer, sent for his health, was in despair on account of his physical and moral distress, boring his skull in order to find an idea far from Paris, and mingled with demands for potions, for prescriptions, with uneasiness about money or trade, transmissions of proofs, notes renewed, always the same cry of desire and of adoration towards that beautiful Sapho's body which the physicians forbade to him.

Jean murmured, enraged but unreservedly :

" But what was the matter with them all to be after you like that ? "

This was to him the only meaning of those desolate letters, confessing the disarray of one of those glorious lives that are envied by young men and that are dreamed of by romantic women — Yes, what, then, was the matter with them all ? And what did she make them drink ? — He felt the

atrocious suffering of a man who, bound fast, could see outraged before his eyes the woman whom he loves; and, nevertheless, he could not decide on emptying all at once, with his eyes shut, that box to the bottom.

At present, came the turn of the engraver who, wretched, unknown, without any other fame than that of the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, owed his place in the reliquary only to the great love entertained for him. Dishonoring, those letters dated from Mazas, and silly, awkward, sentimental as those of the trooper to his sweetheart. But one felt in them, through the commonplaces of romance, an accent of sincerity in passion, a respect for the woman, a forgetfulness of one's self which distinguished him from the others, convict as he was; thus, when he asked Fanny's pardon for the crime of having loved her too much, or when from the registry office of the Palais de Justice, immediately after his condemnation, he wrote of his joy at knowing that his mistress was acquitted and free. He did not complain of anything; he had had beside her, thanks to her, two years of such full, such profound happiness,

that its memory would suffice to fill his life, to sweeten the horror of his fate, and he ended by the request for a service:

“You know that I have a child in the country, whose mother is long since dead; he lives with an old female relative, in so out-of-the-way a corner that one would never know anything of my affair. The money that remained to me, I have sent to them, saying that I was going away very far, on a journey, and it is on you that I count, my good Nini, to get information from time to time of that unfortunate little boy and to send me news of him ——”

In proof of Fanny’s interest, there followed a letter of thanks and another, quite recent, being dated scarcely six months back: “Oh! you were good to come —— How beautiful you were, how good, in face of my prisoner’s jacket of which I felt so very much ashamed! ——” and Jean stopped, furious: “You have, then, continued to see him?”

“At long intervals, from charity ——”

“Even since we have been together? ——”

"Yes, once, a single time, in the parlor ——, one sees them only there."

"Ah! you are a good girl ——"

The idea that, despite their intrigue, she visited that forger, exasperated him more than anything else. He was too proud to say so; but a package of letters, the last, tied with a blue favor and written in little fine and sloping characters, a woman's handwriting, unchained all his wrath.

"I change tunic after the chariot race ——, come into my dressing-room ——"

"No, no, do not read it ——"

She leaped on him, snatched and threw the whole bundle in the fire, without his understanding at first, even when seeing her on her knees, empurpled by the reflection of the flame and by the shame of her avowal :

"I was young, it is Caoudal ——, that big fool —— I did what he wanted."

Then only did he understand, and became very pale.

"Ah! yes ——, Sapho ——, the whole lyre ——"
And pushing her away with his foot, like an unclean

beast: "Leave me, do not touch me, you stir up my stomach ——"

Her exclamation was lost in a frightful rumbling of thunder, quite near and prolonged, at the same time that a bright flash lit up the room —— Fire! —— She stood up in terror, mechanically took hold of the decanter that remained on the table, emptied it on that mass of papers, the flame from which was kindling last winter's soot, then the water-pot, the pitchers, and seeing herself powerless, sparks flying to the middle of the room, she ran to the balcony, calling: "Fire! fire!"

The Hettémas arrived first, then the janitor, the city police. Someone called out:

"Lower the register! —— get up on the roof! —— water, water! —— no, a blanket! ——"

Cast down, they were looking at their interior, invaded and soiled; then, the alarm ended, the fire extinguished, when the dark crowd below under the street gas had scattered, the neighbors reassured, having returned to their homes, the two lovers, in the midst of that slop of water, of muddy soot, of furniture upset and dripping, felt themselves

disheartened and weak, without strength to resume the quarrel or to make the room clean around them. Something sinister and low had just entered into their lives ; and that evening, forgetting their former repugnances, they went to sleep at the hotel.

Fanny's sacrifice was not to serve to any purpose. Of those letters that had disappeared, burned, whole phrases retained by heart haunted her lover's memory, mounted to his countenance in rushes of blood, like certain passages of bad books. And those former lovers of his mistress were nearly all famous men. The dead survived ; as for the living, one saw their portraits and their names everywhere, one spoke of them in his presence, and each time he felt an embarrassment, as though a family tie were painfully severed.

The pain clearing his mind and his eyes, he soon came to find again with Fanny the trace of the first influences, and the words, the ideas, the habits that she had kept of them. That manner of advancing the thumb as if to model, to mould the object of which she spoke, with a "you see it from here ——,"

belonged to the sculptor. From Dejoie she had taken the mania for the fag ends of phrases, and the popular songs of which he had published a collection, famous in every corner of France; from La Gournerie, her haughty and sneering intonation, the severity of her judgments on modern literature.

She had assimilated all that, superposing the unlikes, by that same phenomenon of stratification which enables us to know the age and the revolutions of the earth by its different geological layers; and, perhaps, she was not so intelligent as she had at first seemed to him. Yet there was, indeed, intellect there; dull as no one else, vulgar and ten years older still, she could have held him by the strength of her past, by that low jealousy which was gnawing him and whose irritations and rancors were no longer silent, breaking out on every occasion against one another.

Dejoie's romances were no longer selling, the whole edition was lying on the quay at twenty-five centimes. And that old fool Caoudal obstinately in love at his age — “ You know that he no longer has any teeth — I looked at him at the Ville-

d'Avray breakfast — He eats like a goat, in the front of his mouth." Talent also had flown. What a botch was his *Faunesse* in the last Salon! "It did not take —" An expression that came to him from her, "It did not take —" and which she herself had from the sculptor. When he thus fell foul of one of his rivals of the past, Fanny joined in the chorus to please him; and one might have heard that chap ignorant of art, of life, of everything, and that superficial girl, rubbed over with a little wit by those famous artists, judge them with an air of superiority, doctorally condemn them.

But Gaussin's secret enemy was Flamant the engraver. Of him he knew only that he was very handsome, blond like himself, that he was called "my love," that he was visited on the sly, and that when he attacked him like the others, calling him "the sentimental Convict" or "the Handsome Recluse," Fanny turned away her head without saying a word. Ere long he accused his mistress of feeling tenderness for this bandit, and she had to explain herself about it gently, but with a certain firmness.

“ You know well, Jean, that I no longer love him, since I love you — I no longer go down there, I do not answer his letters ; but you will never make me speak ill of the man who adored me to madness, to crime —” At this frank declaration, her better nature, Jean did not protest, but he was suffering from a jealous hate, intensified by uneasiness, which sometimes brought him back to the Rue d'Amsterdam in surprise, in the middle of the day. “ If she had gone to see him !”

He always found her there, domestic, inactive in their little lodging like an Eastern woman, or seated at the piano, giving a singing-lesson to their fat neighbor woman, Madame Hettéma. Since the evening of the fire, they had become sociable with those good people, placid and plethoric, living in a perpetual air-current, doors and windows open.

The husband, a designer in the Artillery Museum, brought work home, and each week day evening, and all day on Sunday, one saw him leaning over his large trestle table, perspiring, panting, in his shirt-sleeves, shaking his arms to make the air circulate

freely between his beard and his eyes. Beside him, his fat wife in undervest was also evaporating, though she was never doing anything; and, to refresh their blood, they took up from time to time one of their favorite duos.

Intimacy was quickly established between the two households.

In the morning, towards ten o'clock, Hettéma's strong voice called out in front of the door: "Are you there, Gaussin?" And their offices being in the same direction, they took a walk together. Quite dull, quite commonplace, some social degrees lower than his young companion, the designer spoke little, mumbled as if he had as much beard in his mouth as on his cheeks; but one felt that he was a good fellow, and Jean's moral disarray had need of that contact. He held to it especially because of his mistress living in a solitude peopled with memories and with regrets more dangerous perhaps than the relations which she had voluntarily given up, and which had found in Madame Hettéma, incessantly concerned with her man, and with the gluttonous surprise that she gave him for dinner, and with the new romance

that she would sing at dessert, an honest and sound companion.

Nevertheless, when friendship had extended to reciprocal invitations, a scruple came to him. Those people must have believed them married, his conscience was repulsive to lying, and he charged Fanny to notify the neighbor woman, so that there be no misunderstanding. That made her laugh a great deal — Poor baby ! only he would be guilty of like unaffectedness — “ But they have not believed for a minute that we were married — And how they make fun of it ! — If you knew where he got his wife from — All that I have done, I, is innocence itself. He married her only to have her all alone to himself, and you see that the past scarcely troubles him — ”

He did not get over it. An old one, this good mother with bright eyes, with a little childish laugh on features of tender flesh, with drawling provincialisms, and for whom romances were never sentimental enough, nor words too high-strung ; and he, the man, so tranquil, so sure in his lover's well-being ! He looked at him walking by his side, his

pipe between his teeth, with little breathings of bliss, whilst he himself was ever thinking, was being devoured with powerless rage.

"You'll get over that, dear," Fanny said to him, gently, at the hours when one is saying everything in one's mind; and she appeased him, tender and charming as on the first day, but with something of carelessness which Jean knew not how to define.

It was her freer get-up and her manner of expressing herself, a consciousness of her power, strange confidences that he did not ask her about her past life, her former debauches, her follies of curiosity. She now no longer deprived herself of smoking, rolling between her fingers, placing on all the furniture, the eternal cigarette with which fast girls while away the daytime, and in their discussions she expressed upon life—the infamy of men and women's rogueries—the most cynical theories. Even the expression of her eyes was changed; they were bedulled with a moisture as of stagnant water, in which passed the flash of a libertine laugh.

And the inner character of their tenderness was transformed also. At first, restrained by her lover's youth, whose first illusion she respected, the woman was no longer constrained after having seen the effect on that boy of her debauched past suddenly discovered,—the swamp fever with which she had heated his blood. And the perverse caresses so long kept back, all those delirious expressions that her teeth stopped on the way, she released at present, and displayed, giving herself up in her full character of a loving and learned courtesan, in all the horrible glory of Sapho.

Modesty, reserve, of what use? Men are all alike, carried away by vice and corruption, this little fellow like the rest. To allure them with what they love is still the best means of holding them. And what she knew, those depravities of pleasure with which she had been inoculated, Jean learned them, to pass them, in his turn, to others. Thus the poison goes, is propagated, a burning of body and soul, like to those torches of which the Latin poet speaks, and which passed from hand to hand along the race-course.

V

In their bedroom, beside a fine portrait of Fanny by James Tissot, a waif from the girl's former splendors, there was a Southern landscape, all black and white, rudely made in the sunshine by a country photographer.

A rocky hillside terraced with vines, held up by stone dykes, then, above, behind rows of cypress checking the north wind, and alongside of a little wood of pines and myrtles with clear reflexes, the large white house, half farmhouse, half château, with large stone steps, an Italian roof, shield-paneled doors, which were continued in the red walls of the Provençal *mas*, roosts for the peacocks, the barn for the flocks, the dark arch of the shed, opening on the glitter of ploughs and harrows. The ruins of ancient ramparts, an enormous tower, outlined on a cloudless

sky, dominated everything, with some roofs and the Roman bell-tower of Châteauneuf-des-Papes, where the Gaussins of Armandy had dwelt from time immemorial.

Castelet, an enclosure and a domain, rich in its vineyards, famous as those of La Nerte and of L'Ermitage, was transmitted from father to son, not divided among all the children; but the youngest always managed it, by that family tradition of sending the eldest into the consulates. Unfortunately, nature often upsets these plans; and if there ever was a being incapable of managing a domain, of managing anything whatever, it was certainly Césaire Gaussin, on whom this heavy responsibility became incumbent at twenty-four.

A libertine, a frequenter of village gambling and bawdy houses, Césaire, or rather Le Fénat, the good-for-nothing, the bad rascal, to give him his youthful nickname, accentuated this contradictory type which appears at long intervals in the most austere families, of which it is, as it were, the escape-valve.

In a few years of recklessness, of imbecile dissipations, of disastrous card gambling in the

Avignon and Orange clubs, the enclosure was mortgaged, the reserve cellars were run dry, the future harvests sold in advance; then one day, on the eve of a final seizure, Le Fénat forged his brother's signature, issued three drafts payable at the Shanghai consulate, persuaded that before they fell due he would find the money to retire them; but they regularly reached the elder brother along with a despairing letter acknowledging the ruin and the forgeries. The consul hurried to Châteauneuf, remedied this desperate situation, with the aid of his savings and of his wife's dowry, and seeing Le Fénat's incapacity, he gave up the "career" which, nevertheless, was opening brilliantly ahead of him, and became a mere vine-dresser.

He was a true Gaussin, traditional even to mania, violent and calm, after the manner of extinct volcanoes with their menaces of eruption in reserve; withal, he was industrious and was well versed in cultivation. Thanks to him, Castellet prospered, was enlarged by all the farms as far as the Rhône, and as human chances always

go in company, little Jean made his appearance under the myrtles of the domain. During that time, Le Fénat was wandering about the house, annihilated under the weight of his mistake, scarcely daring to raise his eyes towards his brother, whose contemptuous silence was overwhelming him; he breathed only in the fields, when hunting and fishing, tiring his sorrow with inept occupations, picking up snails, cutting for himself superb myrtle or reed canes, and breakfasting all alone, without, on a skewer of linnets which he cooked, with an olive log fire, on the open heath. In the evening, having returned to dine at the fraternal table, he did not utter a word, despite his sister-in-law's indulgent smile, who pitied the poor being and furnished him with pocket-money, unknown to her husband, who was strict towards Le Fénat, less on account of his past follies than of all those to be committed; and indeed, the chief silly prank having been repaired, the elder Gaussin's pride was put to a new test.

Three times a week, there came, on sewing days, to Castelet, a fisherman's pretty daughter,

Divonne Abrieu, born amid the osier beds on the bank of the Rhône,—a true fluvial plant with an undulating and long stem. Under her *catalane*, made up of three pieces binding her little head and whose strings thrown back allowed one to admire the joint of the neck, slightly browned, as was the face, as far as the delicate swelling of the throat and of the shoulders, she made one dream of some *done* of the ancient Courts of Love formerly held all around Châteauneuf, at Courthezon, at Vacqueiras, in those old donjons whose ruins are just traceable along the hills.

This historic memory counted for nothing in Césaire's love, for he was a simple soul, devoid of ideal and of reading; but, of small stature, he loved tall women, and was smitten from the first day. He, Le Fénat, was experienced in these village adventures: a country-dance at the Sunday ball, a present of game, then at the first meeting in the open fields, the spirited attack to throw one on the broad of one's back, on the lavender or on the sward. It was found that Divonne did not dance, that she carried the

game to the kitchen, and that, solid as one of those river-bank poplars, white and flexible, she sent the seducer sprawling ten paces away. Afterwards, she kept him at a distance with the point of her scissors hanging at her girdle by a steel clasp; made him madly in love, so much so that he spoke of marrying, and confided in his sister-in-law. The latter, acquainted with Divonne Abrieu since childhood, knowing her to be serious and modest, found in the bottom of her heart that this mismatching would perhaps be the saving of Le Fénat; but the consul's pride revolted at the idea of a Gaussin of Armandy marrying a peasant girl: "If Césaire does that, I do not see him again ——" And he kept his word.

Césaire, when married, left Castelet, went to live on the bank of the Rhône with his wife's relatives, on a small income that was allowed to him by his brother and that was brought to him every month by his indulgent sister-in-law. Little Jean accompanied his mother on her visits, delighted with the Abrieus' cabin, a variety of

smoked rotunda, shaken by the north and north-west winds, and which was held up by a single beam, vertical as a mast. The open door looked straight on the little jetty on which the nets were drying, on which shone and fluttered the bright and pearly silver of the shells; beyond floated two or three big barks, rolling and creaking at their cables, on the large, joyous, broad, luminous river, lashed by the wind against its pale-green tufted isles. And Jean, when quite small, got there his taste for distant journeys, and for the sea that he had not yet seen.

That exile of Uncle Césaire lasted two or three years, and would never have ended, perhaps, without a family event—the birth of the two little twin girls, Marthe and Marie. The mother fell sick in consequence of this double confinement, and Césaire and his wife had permission to come and see her. The reconciliation of the two brothers followed, unreasoned, instinctive, by the omnipotence of the same blood; the household lived at Castelet, and as an incurable anæmia, soon complicated with rheumatic gout, made the poor

mother powerless, Divonne found herself charged with managing the house, with watching over the feeding of the little ones, the numerous personnel, with going to see Jean twice a week at the Avignon lyceum, without counting that the care of her patient claimed her at every hour.

An orderly and clear-headed woman, she made up for the instruction that was wanting to her by her intelligence, her peasant keenness, and the fragments of studies remaining in the subdued and disciplined Le Fénat's brain. The consul depended on her for the whole outlay of the house, very heavy with its accrued charges and with the revenues diminishing from year to year eaten up at the roots of the vines by the phylloxera. The entire plain was affected, but the enclosure still resisted, and it was the consul's concern to save the enclosure by force of investigation and experience.

This Divonne Abrieu, who remained faithful to her headdress, to her artisan's key-chain, and held herself so modestly in her place of overseer,

of companion lady, kept the house from embarrassment in those years of crisis, the patient ever surrounded by the same costly cares,—the little ones brought up beside their mother, as young ladies, Jean's schooling regularly paid for, first at the lyceum, then at Aix, where he began his course in law, and finally at Paris, where he had gone to finish it.

By what miracles of order and vigilance she achieved her purposes, all were as ignorant as herself. But each time that Jean dreamt of Castelet, that he raised his eyes towards the photograph with pale reflections and faded, the first figure called up, the first name pronounced, was Divonne, the peasant woman with the big heart that he felt concealed behind their gentility and holding it up by the effort of her will. For some days past, however, since he knew what his mistress was, he avoided pronouncing that venerated name in her presence, like that of his mother or any of his folks; even the sight of the photograph embarrassed him, displaced, astray on that wall, over Sapho's bed.

One day, on returning to dinner, he was surprised to see three covers instead of two, still more to find Fanny in the act of playing cards with a little man whom he did not recognize at first, but who on turning round showed him the clear wild-goat eyes, the large conquering nose on a tanned and gay-looking face, the bald head and *Leaguer* beard of Uncle Césaire. To his nephew's exclamation, he answered, without dropping the cards:

"You see I am not wearied, I am trying a hand at *béziq*ue with my niece."

His niece!

And Jean was so carefully concealing his intrigue from everybody! That familiarity displeased him, and the things that Césaire retailed to him in a low voice, whilst Fanny was concerned with dinner — "My compliments, little fellow —, eyes —, arms —, a royal morsel." It was much worse, when at table Le Fénat took to speaking without any reserve of the affairs of Castelet, of what brought him to Paris.

The pretext for the journey was ready money, eight thousand francs that he had formerly loaned to his friend Courbebaisse and which he never counted on seeing again, when a letter from the notary had informed him both of Courbebaisse's death, *pechère!* and of the reimbursement of his eight thousand francs, awaiting him. But the real motive, for they could have had the money sent to him—"the real motive is your mother's health, my poor boy — For some time past she has been growing very much weaker, and occasionally her head has been giving way; she forgets everything, even the names of the little ones. The other evening, your father went out of her room, and she asked Divonne who that good gentleman was who was coming to see her so often. No one has yet noticed it but your aunt, and she spoke to me of it only to get me to come to consult Bouchereau on the condition of the poor woman whom he formerly attended."

"Have you already had crazy folks in your family?" Fanny asked, with a patronizing and serious air, her La Gournerie air.

"Never ——," said Le Fénat, adding, with a roguish smile, reaching back to his temples, that he had been a little of a sinner in his youth ——, "but my madness did not displease the ladies, and there was no need of locking me up."

Jean was looking at them, his heart bursting. To the sorrow caused in him by the sad news, was added an oppressing uneasiness at hearing that woman speak of his mother, of her infirmities of a critical age, with the free language and the experience of a matron, her elbows on the tablecloth, while rolling a cigarette. And the other, babbling, indiscreet, was letting himself loose, was telling the inner secrets of the family.

Ah! the vines ——, the deuced vines! —— And the enclosure itself had no more of them for a long time; half of the fruitage was already devoured, and they preserved the rest only by miracle, only by caring for each bunch, each grape, as for sick children, with drugs that cost much. The terrible thing was that the consul was obstinate in still planting new vine plants that the worm attacked, instead of leaving to

the cultivation of olives, of capers, all that good land, now useless, covered with sickly and mildewed vine-branches.

Fortunately, Césaire himself had a few acres on the banks of the Rhône, which he cared for by irrigation,—a superb discovery applicable only to low lands. Already a good harvest was encouraging him, with an inferior, weak wine,—“frog wine,” said the consul, disdainfully; but Le Fénat was obstinate also, and, with Courbe-baisse’s eight thousand francs, he was going to buy La Piboulette —

“You know, little fellow, the first island on the Rhône, below the Abrieus’ —; but this between ourselves, it is necessary that no one at Castelet suspect anything of it yet —”

“Not even Divonne, uncle?” Fanny asked, smiling —

At his wife’s name, Le Fénat’s eyes became moist:

“Oh! Divonne, I never do anything without her. She has faith in my idea, moreover, and would be so happy that her poor Césaire should

restore the fortune of Castelet, after having begun its ruin."

Jean shuddered. Was he, then, going to make his confession, to relate that lamentable history of the forgeries? But the Provençal, full of tenderness for Divonne, had started to speak of her, of the happiness that she gave him. So beautiful, too, so magnificently shaped:

"See, niece, you who are a woman, you ought to know about it."

He handed to her a card portrait, taken from his portfolio, which never left him.

By Jean's filial accent when he spoke of his aunt, by the peasant woman's maternal advice written in a large hand, somewhat trembling, Fanny pictured to herself one of those village women with the strange handkerchief head-dress peculiar to Seine-et-Oise, and remained struck in the presence of that pretty countenance with pure lines, intensified by the close white hood, that elegant and supple form of a woman of thirty-five.

"Very beautiful indeed —," she said, as she pursed her lips, with a strange intonation.

“And what a form!” remarked the uncle, who was holding on to his picture.

Then they went out on the balcony. After a warm day from which the veranda zinc was still quite hot, there fell from a scarcely perceptible cloud a fine dewy rain that refreshed the air, tinkled pleasantly on the roofs, made the sidewalks muddy. Paris was smiling under that shower, and the going of the multitude, of the carriages, all that rising murmur was intoxicating the provincial, was ringing in his empty and unsettled head like a little bell, reminders of youth, and of a three months’ sojourn that he had made, some thirty years before, at the house of his friend Courbebaisse.

What revels, my children, what tipplings! — And their entry into the Prado one mid-Lent night, Courbebaisse as Chicard, and his mistress, La Mornas, as a hawker of songs, a disguise that brought her a chance, since she had become a café-concert celebrity. He himself, the uncle, brought in tow a little dandy of the quarter whom they called Pellicule — And made quite mirthful again, he was laughing from his mouth

to his very temples, was humming dance tunes, and seizing his niece, with modesty, by the waist. At midnight, when he left them to reach the Hôtel Cujas, the only one that he knew in Paris, he was singing, full-throated, on the stairway, was sending kisses to his niece who was lighting his way, and was calling to Jean:

“You know, take care of yourself! ——”

As soon as he had left, Fanny, whose brow kept an anxious frown, went briskly into her toilet-room, and, through the door that remained half open, whilst Jean was going to bed, she began, in an almost careless voice: “Say, then, she is very pretty, is your aunt ——, it no longer astonishes me that you speak of her so often —— You must have made love to her for that poor Fénat, a figure-head, moreover ——”

He protested with all his indignation —— Divonne! a second mother to him, who, when he was quite small, took care of him, dressed him —— She had saved him from a malady, from death ——, no, never would the temptation of such an infamy come to him.

"Go, then; go, then," continued the woman, in a strident voice, with hairpins between her teeth; "you will not make me believe that, with those eyes and the fine frame of which that imbecile spoke, his Divonne has been able to remain without desire beside a handsome blond with a girl's skin like you! — You see, from the banks of the Rhône or elsewhere, we are all the same —"

She said so with conviction, believing her whole sex moved by every caprice and overcome by the first desire. He defended himself, but disturbed, interrogating his memory, asking himself if ever the slight touch of an innocent caress had been able to warn him of any danger whatever; and though finding nothing, the purity of his affection remained attacked, the pure cameo striped as with a nail scratch —

"See! — look —, the hood of your country —"

On her fine hair, massed in two long plaits, she had pinned a white handkerchief that rather closely imitated the "catalane," the three-pieced linen cap of the daughters of Châteauneuf; and

right in front of him, in the milk-white folds of her night cambric, her eyes ablaze, she asked him:

"Do I resemble Divonne?"

Oh! no, not at all; she resembled only herself under that little bonnet recalling the other, that of Saint-Lazare, which made her so pretty, they said, whilst she was sending to her convict her farewell kiss in the midst of the tribunal: "Don't get weary, my love, the fine days will return ——"

And that reminder did him so much harm that, as soon as his mistress was in bed, he very speedily put out the light, so as no longer to see her.

Very early next day the uncle arrived in a boisterous mood, his cane aloft, exclaiming: "Whoa! the babies," with a frisky and patronizing intonation which Courbebaisse had formerly when he came to look for him in Pellicule's arms. He appeared still more excited than the evening before: the Hôtel Cujas, no doubt, and especially the eight thousand francs folded in his pocket-book, explain this. The money for La Piboulette,

to be sure, but he had indeed the right to take a few louis of it to offer a breakfast in the country to his niece! ——

“And Bouchereau?” observed the nephew, who could not stay from his ministry two days in succession. It was agreed that they would breakfast in the Champs-Élysées and that the two men would go afterward to the consultation.

It was not what Le Fénat had dreamt of,—the arrival at Saint-Cloud in a grand coach, the vehicle filled with champagne; but the repast was charming all the same on the restaurant terrace, shaded with acacias and with Japan varnish trees, penetrated by the tootings of a daily rehearsal at the neighboring concert-café. Césaire, in a very babbling mood, quite gallant, put all his graces in practice in order to dazzle the Parisian woman. He “guyed” the boys, complimented the “chef” on his sauce; and Fanny laughed with a stupid and forced outburst, a kind of private-supper silliness that was painful to Gaussin, as was also the intimacy that was being established between the uncle and the niece over his head.

One would have said they were friends of twenty years' standing. Le Fénat having become sentimental over the dessert wines, was speaking of Castelet, of Divonne, and also of his little Jean; he was happy to know that he was with her, a serious woman who would keep him from doing silly things. And on the way to take the young man whose character was somewhat skittish, he gave advice to her, as to a young bride, while patting her on the arms, his tongue thick, his eye dull and moist.

He became sober at Bouchereau's. Two hours' waiting on the second story in the Place Vendôme, in those large parlors, high and cold, crowded with a silent and agonized multitude; the hell of sorrow through all of whose circles they passed in succession, going from room to room until they reached the illustrious scholar's office.

Bouchereau, with his prodigious memory, quite distinctly recalled Madame Gaussin, having gone on a consultation to Castelet ten years before, at the beginning of the malady; he had its different

phases related to him, re-read the old prescriptions, and immediately reassured the two men as to the cerebral accidents that had just been produced and which he attributed to the use of certain medicaments. Whilst showing no emotion, his heavy eyebrows lowered over his sharp and searching little eyes, he was writing a long letter to his *confrère* at Avignon, the uncle and the nephew were listening, holding their breath; the scratching of that pen was stilling for them, of itself alone, all the noise of luxurious Paris; and suddenly appeared to them the physician's power in modern times, the last priest, the supreme belief, the invincible superstition —

Césaire left there, serious and cold:

"I am going back to the hotel to strap my trunk; the Paris air is bad for me, you see, little fellow —, if I stayed here I should do stupid things. I will take the seven o'clock train this evening; excuse me to my niece, eh?"

Jean took good care not to keep him, frightened as he was at his childishness, at his levity; and next day, on awaking, he was congratulating

himself on knowing he had returned, under lock and key, to Divonne's side, when they saw him enter, his appearance disordered, his linen disarranged:——

“Good God, uncle, what has happened to you?”

Sinking helplessly into an arm-chair, without voice and without movement at first, but becoming animated by degrees, the uncle acknowledged a timely meeting with Courbebaisse, the too free dinner, the eight thousand francs lost during the night in a gambling-hell —— Not a sou left, nothing! —— How go back yonder and tell it to Divonne! And the purchase of La Piboullette. Suddenly seized with a sort of delirium, he put his hands over his eyes, his thumbs stopping up his ears, howling, sobbing, unrestrained, the Southerner was inveighing against himself, was displaying his remorse in a general confession of his whole life. He was the shame and the misfortune of his people; such men as he in families should rightly be beaten down like wolves. Without his brother's generosity, where

would he be? — In the chain gang with robbers and forgers.

"Uncle, uncle! —" said Gaussin, very unhappy, trying to stop him.

But the other, voluntarily blind and deaf, was delighting in that public testimony of his crime, related with most minute detail, whilst Fanny was looking at him with pity mingled with admiration. An emotional man at least was he, a spend-all such as she liked; and her better feelings being touched, she was looking for a means of coming to his aid. But what? She no longer saw anyone for a year past, Jean had no relation — Suddenly a name came to her mind: Déchelette! — He must be in Paris at that moment, and he was such a good fellow.

"But I scarcely know him," said Jean.

"I'll go, I will —"

"What! you will? —"

"Why not?"

Their glances met and they understood each other. Déchelette also had been her lover, the lover of a night that she scarcely recalled. But

he did not forget one of them ; they were all ranged in his head, like the saints in a calendar.

"If it annoys you ——," she remarked, a little embarrassed.

Then Césaire, who, during this brief debate, had stopped crying, very anxious, turned towards them such a look of desperate supplication that Jean gave in, and grudgingly assented ——

How long that hour seemed to them, to both of them, distracted by thoughts that they did not acknowledge, leaning on the balcony, watching for the woman's return.

"He is very far away, then, that Déchelette? ——"

"Oh! no, in the Rue de Rome ——, a couple of steps," Jean replied, furious, and also thinking that Fanny was very long in returning. He tried to keep himself quiet with the engineer's amorous motto: "No to-morrow," and the contemptuous way in which he had heard him speak of Sapho, as of one old in the life of gallantry; but his lover's pride revolted, and he would have almost wished that Déchelette still found her beautiful

and desirable. Ah! that old offender, Césaire, was the cause of thus reopening all his wounds.

At last, Fanny's cloak appeared at the corner of the street. She was coming back, radiant:

"It is done —, I have the money."

The eight thousand francs spread out before him, the uncle wept for joy; wanted to give a receipt, to settle on the interest, the date of reimbursement.

"Useless, uncle —, I did not pronounce your name — It is to me that this money has been loaned, it is to me that you owe it, and as long as you please."

"Such services, my child," Césaire answered, in a transport of gratitude, "one pays with friendship that is unending —" And in the railway station, whither Gaussin accompanied him to be assured this time of his departure, he repeated, with tears in his eyes: "What a woman, what a treasure! — You must make her happy, you see —"

Jean remained very sorry for that adventure, feeling his chain, already so heavy, riveted more

and more, and two things confounded that his native delicacy had ever kept separate and distinct: his family and his intrigue. Now, Césaire posted the mistress as to his labors and his plantations, and gave her news of everything at Castelet; and Fanny criticised the consul's obstinacy in the affair of the vines, spoke of his mother's health, irritated Jean with solicitude and with misplaced advice. Never any allusion to the service rendered, for example, nor to Le Fénat's former adventure, to that blemish on the house of Armandy, which the uncle had divulged in her presence. Only once did she make use of it as a weapon of defence, in these circumstances:

They were returning from the theatre, and were getting into a carriage in the rain, at a boulevard stand. The equipage, one of those rickety cabs that run only after midnight, was slow in starting, the man asleep, the beast shaking off his feed-bag. Whilst they were waiting under shelter in the hack, an old driver, in the act of readjusting a thong to his whip, quietly approached the door, his lash between his teeth, and said to

Fanny in a broken voice that smelt strongly of wine :

“Good evening —— How goes it?”

“Oho! is it you?”

She gave a slight jump that was quickly repressed, and, quite low, to her lover: “My father! ——”

Her father, that marauder with the long gabardine from an old livery, soiled with mud, with the metal buttons torn off and showing under the sidewalk gas a bloated face, apoplectic-looking from alcohol, in which Gaussin imagined he found again in vulgar type Fanny’s regular and sensual profile, her large passionate eyes! Without being concerned about the man who accompanied his daughter, and as if he had not seen him, old man Legrand gave news of home. “The old woman is at the Necker for a fortnight past; she is spinning a very bad cotton —— Go, then, and see her one of these Thursdays, it will give her courage —— As for me, fortunately, the box is solid; always a good whip, a good lash. Only trade is not going well —— If you needed

a good coachman by the month, it would do nicely for me — No? so much the worse, then, and so long —”

They then shook each other's hands indifferently; the hack started.

“Eh? you think —,” Fanny murmured; and immediately she started to speak to him of her family at some length, a thing she had always avoided —; “it was so ugly, so low —,” but they knew each other better now; they no longer had anything to conceal.

She was born at Moulin-aux-Anglais, in the suburbs, of that father, an old dragoon, who did the coach service from Paris to Châtillon, and of a servant-girl at an inn, between two rounds at the counter.

She had not known her mother, who had died in childbirth; only the patrons of the relay, good folks, obliged the father to acknowledge his little one and to pay for the months of nursing. He dared not refuse, for he was deeply in debt to the house, and when Fanny was four years old he took her away in his coach, like a little dog,

nestled on top, under the awning, amused at thus rolling along the roads, at seeing the lamplights running on both sides, the beasts' backs smoking and panting, going to sleep in the dark, in the north wind, to the jingle of the bells.

But old man Legrand soon got tired of this paternity pose; little as it cost, it was necessary to feed, to clothe that brat. Then she was in the way of his getting married to the widow of a truck farmer at whose melon plants and cabbages in squares along the line of his route he cast an envious eye. She then felt very distinctly that her father wanted to lose her; it was his fixed idea of a drunkard, to get rid of the child by hook or by crook, and if the widow herself, the good mother Machaume, had not taken the little girl under her protection ——

"In fact, you knew her, Machaume," said Fanny.

"What! that servant whom I saw at your house ——"

"She was my step-mother —— She had been so good to me when I was little; I took her in order to wrest her from her brute of a husband

who, after having eaten up all she had, mauled and beat her, obliged her to wait on a trollop with whom he was living — Ah! poor Machaume, she knows what a fine man costs — Well! when she left me, in spite of all that I could say to her, she made haste to go back to him, and now there she is in a hospice. How he goes his way without her, the old scoundrel! how dirty he was! what a rounder's face! he has nothing but his whip —, did you see how straight he held it? — Though drunk enough to fall, he carries it in front of him like a candle, holds on to it in his room; he has never had anything clean but it — A good whip, a good lash, that is his phrase."

She spoke of him unconcernedly, as of a stranger, without disgust or shame; and Jean was becoming frightened while listening to her. That father! — that mother! — compared with the consul's severe bearing and Madame Gaussin's angelic smile! — And suddenly understanding what there was in her lover's silence, what a revolt against that social slop with which he was bespattering himself in her company: "After all," said

Chapter XII

He wished to rise; he had that courage, and to tell her that all she was doing was useless; but clinging to him, dragging herself on her knees in the mud that remained in that hollow in the dell, she forced him to resume his place, and in front of him, between his legs, with the breath of her lips, the voluptuous glance of her eyes, and childish caresses, her hands spread on that countenance which was becoming severe, her fingers in his hair and in his mouth, she tried to stir up the cold embers of their love.







Fanny, in a philosophic tone, "there is a little of it in every family, one is not responsible for it —; as for me, I have my old man Legrand; as for you, you have your uncle Césaire."



VI

“My dear child, I write to you again, all trembling from the great trouble that we have just had; our twins lost, away from Castelet for a whole day, a night and the next morning! ——

“It was Sunday, at breakfast-time, when we noticed that the little ones were missing. I had made them pretty for the eight-o’clock mass to which the consul was to take them, then I took no more concern for them, being kept beside your mother, who was more nervous than usual, as if feeling the misfortune that was roaming around us. You know that she has always been so since her illness, foreseeing what is to happen; and the less able she is to budge, the more her head is at work.

“Your mother in her room, happily, you see us all in the dining-room, waiting for the little ones; one calls throughout the enclosure, the shepherd

blows with his big horn for bringing back the sheep, then Césaire on one side, I on the other, Rousseline, Tardive, there we were, all of us, galloping through Castelet, and, each time we met: 'Well?'—'Seen nothing.' At last, one no longer dared to ask; with beating heart, one went to the well, under the high windows of the barn — What a day! — and it was necessary for me to go up every moment to your mother, to smile with a peaceful air, to explain the little ones' absence by saying that I had sent them to spend Sunday with their aunt at Villamuris. She had appeared to believe it; but late in the evening, whilst I was watching her, spying behind the window, the lights that were flitting on the plain, and along the Rhône in search of the children, I heard her weeping softly in her bed; and as I questioned her: 'I am weeping for something that people are concealing from me, but which I have guessed at all the same —,' she answered with that little girl's voice which has returned to her by force of suffering; and without further talking, we were both of us uneasy, separate in our sorrow —

“At last, my dear child, so as not to lengthen this painful story, on Monday morning our little ones were brought back to us by the workmen whom your uncle employs on the island, and who had found them on a heap of vine branches, pale from cold and hunger after that night in the open air, in the middle of the water. And this is what they have told us in the innocence of their little hearts. For a long time past they were tormented with the idea of acting like their patrons, Martha and Mary, whose story they had read, of going away in a boat without sails, or oars, or provisions of any sort, to spread the Gospel on the first shore on which God’s breath would drive them. Accordingly, on Sunday, after mass, untying a barque at the fishery, and kneeling on the bottom like the holy women, whilst the current was carrying them, they went away gently, to get entangled in the reeds of La Piboulette, in spite of the high water of the season, the gust of wind, the *révouluns* — Yes, the good God preserved them, and it is He who has given them back to us, the pretty ones! having somewhat rumped their Sunday wimples

and spoiled the gilding of their prayer-books. No one had the strength to scold them, only big kisses with open arms; but we have all been ill from the fright that we had.

“The one most stricken is your mother, who, without our having yet told her anything, felt, as she says, death passing over Castelet, and keeps, she who is ordinarily so quiet, so pleasant, a sadness that nothing can heal, notwithstanding that your father, I, everybody, have pressed tenderly around her — And I should tell you, my Jean, that it is for you, especially, that she is languishing and uneasy. She dares not acknowledge it in your father’s presence, as he wants you to be left at your work, but you did not come after your examination as you had promised. Give us the surprise for the Christmas holidays; let our patient resume her pleasant smile. If you knew, when we no longer have our old folks, how we regret not having given more time to them —”

Standing near the window through which filtrated a sluggish winter daylight under the fog, Jean was reading this letter, was relishing its wild

flavor, its dear memories of tenderness and of sunshine.

"What is it? — show —"

Fanny had just awakened in the yellow glimmer of the parted curtain, and, heavy from sleep, mechanically reached out her hand towards the "Maryland" package remaining on the night table. He hesitated, knowing the jealousy that was aroused in his mistress by the mere name of Divonne; but how dissemble the letter whose source and form she recognized?

At first the little girls' escapade affected her favorably, whilst, with arms and throat exposed, posing on the pillow with her brown hair floating about her, she was reading while rolling a cigarette; but the ending irritated her to a raging point, and rumpling and throwing the letter into the room: "I will stick to you for it, I will, saintly women! Only inventions to make you leave — Her handsome nephew is necessary to her, to this —"

He wanted to stop her, to stay the filthy word that she hurled, and many others in its train.

Never yet had she behaved so grossly in his presence, in that overflowing of dirty wrath, of a burst sewer giving out its slime and its stench. All the cant words of her past as a libertine and a street-walker were swelling her neck, were distorting her lip.

A simpleton could see what they all wanted down there — Césaire had spoken, and they arranged it in the family to break off their intrigue, and draw him to the country, Divonne's fine form as the bait.

"In the first place, you know, if you leave, I will write to him, to your cuckold — I warn you —, but, oh! —" While speaking, she gathered herself up threateningly on the bed, wan, her face hollow, her features enlarged, like a wild beast ready to bound.

And Gaussin recalled having seen her thus in the Rue de l'Arcade; but it was against him now, this howling hatred that gave to him the temptation to fall on his mistress and to beat her, for in those flesh loves in which esteem and respect for the being loved are as nothing, brutality always rises

up in wrath or caresses. He was afraid of himself, fled to his office, and while walking along, he was indignant against that life which he had been leading. It would teach him whether to give himself up to such a woman! — What infamies, what horrors! — His sisters, his mother, there had been insult for all — What! not even the right to go and see his own. But in what prison, then, had he shut himself up? And the whole history of their intrigue appearing to him, he saw how the Egyptian's fine, bare arms, clasped around his neck the evening of the ball, had tightened despotic and strong, isolating him from his friends, from his family. Now, his resolve was made. That very evening, at any cost, he would leave for Castelet.

Some matters of business attended to, his leave of absence obtained at the ministry, he returned home early, expecting a terrible scene, ready for anything, even a rupture. But the very gentle "good-day" that Fanny spoke to him immediately, her eyes big, her cheeks, as it were, softened with tears, scarcely left him the courage of an effort.

"I leave this evening ——," he said, bracing himself up.

"You are right, my friend —— Go and see your mother, and especially ——" She approached him wheedlingly —— "Forget how wicked I have been, I love you too much, it is my madness ——"

All the rest of the day, packing the trunk with coquettish care, brought back to the gentleness of the early times, she kept that attitude of repentance, perhaps with the hope of keeping him. Nevertheless, not once did she say to him: "Stay ——" and when at the last minute, every hope lost in the presence of the final preparations, she dallied, pressed against her lover, trying to impregnate him with herself for the whole duration of the journey and of the absence, her adieu, her kiss, expressed only this: "Say, Jean, you do not think ill of me? ——"

Oh! the intoxication, in the morning, of waking up in the little room of his childhood, his heart still warm with the family embraces, with the beautiful effusions of the arrival, to find in the same place, on the mosquito curtains of his narrow bed, the

same luminous beam that past awakenings sought there, to hear the cries of the peacocks on their perches, the rattling well-pulley, the clattering of the hurried feet of the flock, and, when he had made his shutters knock against the wall, to see again that fine, warm light which entered in floods, as the falling of flood-gates, and that marvelous horizon of sloping vines, of cypress, of olive, and of shimmering pine woods, growing dimmer as far as the Rhône, under a deep and pure sky, without a shade of mist despite the morning hour,—a green sky, swept all night by the northwest wind that was still filling the immense valley with its brisk and strong breath.

Jean was comparing that reawakening with those of yonder, under that sky as muddy as his love, and felt himself happy and free. He went down. The house, white in sunshine, was still asleep, all its shutters closed like eyes; and he was happy in a moment's solitude to collect himself, in that moral convalescence which he felt beginning for him.

He took a few steps on the terrace, went along a rising alley of the park, and which was called

the park, a wood of pines and myrtles, scattered haphazard on the rugged hillside of Castelet, cut by uneven paths quite slippery with dried pine needles. His dog Miracle, quite old and limping, had left his kennel, and was following him silently at his heels ; they had so often taken that morning walk together.

At the entrance to the vineyards, over which the large enclosing cypress-trees inclined their pointed summits, the dog hesitated ; he knew how difficult to his old paws would be the soil in a thick layer of sand,—a new remedy for the phylloxera which the consul was in the act of trying,—as well as the supporting steps of the terrace. The joy of following his master, nevertheless, made him go on ; and at each obstacle it was painful efforts, little cries of fear, stops and awkward crab movements on a rock. Jean was not looking at him, entirely taken up with that new Alicante plant, of which his father had spoken to him for a long time the evening before. The stems seemed to have come up finely over the smooth and shining sand. At last the poor man

was going to be paid for his obstinate troubles; the Castelet enclosure might revive, when La Nerte, L'Hermitage, all the great growths of the South were dead!

A little white hood arose, all of a sudden, in front of him. It was Divonne, the first up in the house; she had a pruning-knife in her hand, something else also that she threw away, and her cheeks, ordinarily so pale, were lit up with a bright redness: "It is you, Jean? — you made me afraid. I thought it was your father —" Then, composing herself again, she embraced him: "Did you sleep well?"

"Very well, aunt; but why did you fear my father's arrival? —"

"Why? —"

She picked up the vine-root that she had just pulled:

"The consul told you, did he not? that this time he was sure of succeeding — Well, see! there is the beast —"

Jean looked at a little yellowish moss incrusting in the wood, the imperceptible fungus that from

one neighborhood to another has ruined whole provinces; and it was an irony of nature, on that splendid morning, under the vivifying sun, was that infinitely small thing, destroyer and indestructible.

"It is the beginning — In three months the whole enclosure will be devoured, and your father will begin again once more, for he has set his pride on it. There will be new plants, new remedies, until the day —"

A despairing gesture finished and emphasized her phrase.

"Truly! we have come to that with it?"

"Oh! you know the consul — He never says anything, gives me the month's allowance as always; but I see him concerned. He runs to Avignon, to Orange. It is money that he is looking for —"

"And Césaire? his irrigations?" the young man asked in consternation.

Thank God, over there everything was going on well. They had had fifty lots of inferior wine in the last yield; and this year would bring double. On account of this success, the consul had given

up to his brother all the vines of the plain, that had until now remained fallow, in lines of dead wood like a country cemetery; and now they were under water for three months —

And proud of her man's work, of her Fénat, the Provençal woman pointed out to Jean, from the elevated place on which they found themselves, large pools, *clairs*, kept up by layers of lime, as on the salt-marshes.

"In two years that planting will yield; in two years also La Piboulette, and again the island of Lamotte which your uncle bought without saying anything about it — Then we shall be rich —, but we must hold out until then, but let each throw himself into it and sacrifice himself."

She spoke of it pleasantly, of sacrifice, like a woman whom it no longer astonishes, and with such easy enthusiasm that Jean, penetrated by a sudden idea, answered her in the same tone: "One will sacrifice one's self, Divonne —"

That very day he wrote to Fanny that his parents could not continue his allowance, that he would be reduced to the salary from the ministry,

and that, in these conditions, life for two became impossible. It was breaking off sooner than he had thought, three or four years before the foreseen departure ; but he reckoned that his mistress would accept these grave reasons, and that she would have pity on him and on his difficulty, would aid him in this painful performance of a duty.

Was it indeed a sacrifice? Was he not, on the contrary, solaced for bringing to an end a life that seemed to him odious and unhealthy, especially since he had been restored to nature, to his family, to simple and right affections? — His letter written without struggle or suffering, he reckoned, in order to shield him against an answer that he foresaw would be furious, full of threats and extravagances, on the honest and faithful tenderness of the good hearts that surrounded him, the example of that father upright and proud among all, on the pure smile of the holy little women, and also on those broad, peaceful horizons, with the healthy mountain emanations, that sky above, that rapid and enticing river ; for while thinking of his passion, of all the meannesses of which it was

made up, he seemed to himself to be getting out of a pernicious fever such as one contracts in the mist of marshy lands.

Five or six days were passed in silence, caused by the great blow. Morning and evening Jean went to the post-office and returned empty-handed, strangely disturbed. What was she doing? What had she decided on, and, in any case, why not answer? He thought only of that. And at night, everybody being asleep at Castelet, with the lulling sound of the wind through the long corridors, they chatted about it, Césaire and he, in his little room.

"She is on the point of arriving! ——" said the uncle; and his uneasiness was doubled on this account, that he had to enclose in the envelope which contained the letter announcing the rupture two notes, at six months and at one year, settling his debt with interest. How would he pay those notes? How explain to Divonne? —— He was shivering at the mere thought of it, and was causing trouble to his nephew, when, his nose jerked upward and shaking his pipe, the vigil ended, he said to him sadly: "Come, good-evening ——,

in all respects what you have done in this matter is well."

At last that answer arrived, and from the first lines: "My dearest husband, I did not write to you sooner, because I was bound to prove to you otherwise than by words to what extent I understand you and I love you ——" Jean stopped, surprised like a man who hears a symphony instead of the call to parley that he dreaded. He turned quickly to the last page, where he read "—— to remain until death your dog who loves you, whom you may beat, and who caresses you passionately ——"

She had not, then, received his letter! But, taken up again line by line and with tears in his eyes, this was indeed an answer, it said clearly that Fanny was for a long time past awaiting this bad news, the distress at Castelet bringing on the inevitable separation. Immediately she had set out in quest of an occupation so as no longer to remain a charge to him, and she had secured the management of a furnished house, in the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, belonging to a very rich

lady. A hundred francs a month, board, lodging, and free on Sundays ——

“You understand, my man, a whole day every week for us to love; for you will, indeed, continue to love, is it not so? You will reward me for the great effort that I am making to work for the first time in my life, for this slavery by night and by day which I accept, with humiliations that you cannot picture to yourself and that will be very burdensome to my madness for independence —— But I experience an extraordinary contentment in suffering for love of you. I owe you so much, you have made me understand so many good and pure things of which no one had ever spoken to me! Ah! if we had met sooner! —— But you were not yet walking when already I was rolling in men’s arms. Not one of them could ever boast of having inspired me with a like resolve to keep him for ever so little a time —— Now, return when you will, the tenement is free. I have gathered up all my effects; it was the hardest to part with the drawers and the souvenirs. You will find only my portrait, which

will cost you nothing, it will not; only the kindly looks that I beg in its favor. Ah! my love, my love — In fine, if you keep for me my Sunday and my little place on your neck —, my place, you know —” And all those tendernesses, wheedlings, the voluptuous lickings of a mother-cat, of those passionate words, which made the lover press the satin paper to his face, as if the caress came away from it human and warm.

“She does not speak of my notes?” Uncle Césaire asked timidly.

“She sends them back to you — You will reimburse her when you are rich —”

The uncle heaved a sigh of comfort, his temples wrinkled with satisfaction, and with the gravity of a man of experience, in his strong southern intonation:

“Well! do you want me to tell you — That woman is a saint.”

Then, passing to another order of ideas, by that versatility, that want of logic and of memory, one of the laughable phases of his nature: “And what a passion, my good fellow, what a fire! My

mouth is dry from it, as when Courbebaisse read La Mornas' correspondence to me ——"

Once more, Jean had to submit to the first journey to Paris, the Hôtel Cujas, Pellicule; but he did not hear, elbowed at the open window in the becalmed night, bathed in a full moon, so bright that the cocks were deceived by it and saluted it as the rising day.

So, then, there was truth in that redemption by love of which the poets speak; and he felt a pride in thinking that all those great, those illustrious ones whom Fanny had loved before him, far from regenerating her, depraved her more, whilst he, by the mere force of his honesty, would perhaps draw her from vice forever.

He was grateful to her for having found that middle term, that half rupture in which she would take on new habits of work, so hard to her indolent nature; and in a paternal tone, that of an elderly gentleman, he wrote to her next day to encourage her reformation, to express his uneasiness about the sort of house that she was managing, about the people who came to it; for he

was distrustful of her indulgence and of the ease with which she said, resignedly: "What do you want? it is like that ——"

By return of post, with the docility of a little girl, Fanny gave him the picture of the house, a true family hotel inhabited by foreigners. On the second floor, Peruvians, father and mother, children and several servants; on the third, Russians and a wealthy Dutchman, a coral merchant. The rooms on the fourth lodged two Hippodrome riders, "chic" Englishmen, very genteel, and the most interesting little household, Mademoiselle Minna Vogel, a zitherist from Stuttgart, with her brother Léo a poor little consumptive, obliged to interrupt his clarionet studies at the Paris Conservatoire, and whom his big sister had come to take care of, without any other resource than the product of a few concerts to pay for lodging and board.

"All that one can imagine most touching and most honorable, as you see, my beloved. As for myself, I pass for a widow, and they show me all sorts of regards. I would not at first endure

that it be otherwise; your wife must be respected. When I say 'your wife' understand me clearly. I know that you will go away one day, that I will lose you, but afterwards there will never be another; forever will I remain yours, preserving the taste of your caresses and the good instincts that you have reawakened in me — It is very odd, is it not? Sapho virtuous! — Yes, virtuous, when you will no longer be there; but for you I keep myself such as you have loved me, delirious and burning —, I adore you —"

Suddenly, Jean was seized with a great wearisome sorrow. Those returns of the prodigal son, after the joys of arrival, the orgie of the fatted calf and of tender effusions, always suffer from the haunting comparisons with the nomad life, from the regret for the bitter acorns and the lazy flock to be led. It is a disenchantment that falls from things and from beings, all of a sudden despoiled and discolored. The Provençal winter mornings no longer had for him their salubrious sunshine, no attraction had the chase after the reddish-brown

otters, along the steep river banks nor the shooting of wild ducks in old Abrieu's *naye-chien*. Jean found the wind severe, the water rough, and quite monotonous the promenades among the inundated vines with his uncle explaining his system of flood-gates, props, irrigating trenches.

The village which he saw again as on the first days through his joyous rounds as an urchin, old barracks, some abandoned, smacked of the death and desolation of an Italian village; and when he went to the post-office, it was necessary for him to undergo, on the shaking stone of each door, the tiresome repetitions of all those old men, twisted like wild trees, their arms passed into pieces of knitted stockings, of those old women with chins like yellow box-wood under their tightened hoods, with small eyes glistening and twinkling as those of lizards found in old walls.

Ever the same lamentations about the death of the vines, the destruction of the madder, the malady of the mulberries, the seven plagues of Egypt ruining that beautiful country of Provence: and to shun them, sometimes he returned by the

sloping lanes that run along the old fortification walls of the castle of the Popes, deserted lanes encumbered with brushwood, with those large Saint-Roch herbs for healing ringworm, quite in their place in that Middle Age corner, shaded by the enormous jagged ruin overlooking the road.

Then he met Curé Malassagne coming to say his Mass and going down with long, furious steps, his stock awry, his cassock raised by both hands, because of the brambles and of the green-broom. The priest stopped, thundered against the impiety of the peasants, the infamy of the municipal council; he cast his maledictions on fields, beasts, and men, lepers who no longer came to the office, who buried their dead without the sacraments, cured themselves by magnetism, spiritism, so as to spare themselves the priest and the doctor.

“Yes, monsieur, spiritism! that is what they have come to, our peasants of the Comtat — And you do not want the vines to be diseased! —”

Jean, who had Fanny's letter quite open and warm in his pocket, was listening, with an absent look, but escaped as quickly as possible from the

priest's homily, and returned to Castelet to take shelter in the hollow of a rock, which the Provençals call a "cagnard," a safeguard from the wind that blows all around and concentrates the sun's rays reflected upon the stone.

He chose the most inaccessible, the wildest, invaded by briars and scarlet oak, and there lay down on the ground to read his letter; and gradually, from the fine odor that it exhaled, from the endearing words, from the images called up, there came to him a sensual intoxication that stimulated his pulses, hallucinated him so as to make the river, the clusters of islands, the villages in the hollows of the Alpilles, the whole curve of the immense valley in which the squall was chasing the sunbeams and rolling them in waves, disappear as a useless decoration. He was down there in their room, opposite the gray-roofed railway station, a prey to mad caresses, to those furious desires that held one fast to the other with the clutches of the drowning —

Suddenly, steps in the path, clear laughter: "He is there! —" His sisters appeared, their

little limbs bare in the lavender, led by old Miracle, quite proud of having run down his master, and wagging his tail victoriously; but Jean sent him away with a kick and repulsed the offers to play hide-and-seek, or to run, that they made to him in a timid way. He loved them, nevertheless, his little twin-sisters going wild over their big brother, always so far away; he had become a child for them since his arrival, was amused at the contrast of those pretty creatures born at the same time and so unlike. The one tall, dark, with crisp hair, was at the same time mystical and head-strong; it was she who had entertained the idea of the boat, excited by Abbé Malassagne's discourses, and this little Marie the Egyptian had drawn on the blonde Marthe, somewhat soft and gentle, resembling her mother and her brother.

But what a horrible annoyance, whilst he was stirring up his memories, was this clashing of infantile, innocent wheedlings with the bewitching perfume which his mistress's letter shed around him. "No, leave me —, I must work —" And he returned with the intention of shutting himself up

at home, when his father's voice called him in passing.

"It is you, Jean —, listen, then —"

The postman's hour brought fresh subjects for moroseness to this man already gloomy by nature, keeping from the East habits of silent solemnity, interrupted by sudden memories — "When I was consul at Hong-Kong," broke from him with the brightness of logs in full blaze. Whilst he was listening to his father read and discuss his morning newspapers, Jean was looking at Caoudal's Sapho on the mantelpiece, her arms on her knees, her lyre by her side, THE WHOLE LYRE, a bronze purchased twenty years ago, at the time of the Castelet embellishments; and that bronze of commerce, which disgusted him in the Parisian windows, gave him here in his isolation an amorous emotion, the desire to kiss those shoulders, to loose those cold and polished arms, to have said to him: "Sapho for you, but only for you!"

The tempting image rose when he went out, walked with him, doubled the sound of his footstep on the large imposing stairway. It was Sapho's

name that was measured by the pendulum of the old clock, that was whispered by the wind through the spacious corridors, flagged and cold, of the summer residence, her name that he found again in all the books of that country library, old worm-eaten tomes with red edges, preserving between the stitches crumbs from his childhood's luncheons. And that besetting memory of his mistress followed him even into his mother's room, where Divonne was dressing the hair of the patient, was lifting the fine white hair from that countenance that remained peaceful and rosy in spite of her varied and perpetual tortures.

"Ah! there is our Jean," said the mother. But with her bare neck, her little cap, her sleeves turned up for that toilet of which she alone had charge, his aunt recalled to him other reawakenings, called up the mistress again, jumping out of bed in the cloud of her first cigarette. He wanted to be rid of such ideas, in that room especially! But what was he to do to escape from them?

"Our child is no longer the same, sister," said Madame Gaussin, sadly — "What is the matter

with him?" And they sought together. Divonne was torturing her ingenuous understanding, she would have liked to question the young man; but he seemed to shun her now, to avoid being alone with her.

Once, having lain in wait for him, she came and took him by surprise while skulking, in the fever of his letters and of his bad dreams. He arose, his eye gloomy — She held him back, sat down beside him on the warm stone: "You no longer love me, then? — I am, then, no longer your Divonne to whom you told all your troubles?"

"Oh! yes, oh! yes —" he stammered, disturbed by her tender manner, and turning away his eyes so that she could not find in them anything of what he had just read,—love appeals, despairing calls, the delirium of passion at a distance. "What ails you? — why are you sad?" Divonne murmured with wheedlings of voice and hands, such as one has for children. He was something of a little one to her, still ten years old in her eyes, the age of the little men whom one emancipates.

He, already burning from his reading, was excited by the disturbing charm of that fine body so near his own, of that fresh mouth with its color freshened by the open air which disarranged her hair, making it fly over her forehead in delicate curls after the Parisian manner. And Sapho's lessons: "All women are the same —, in man's presence they have only one idea in their heads —," made him find provocation in the peasant woman's happy smile, and in her gesture to keep him for tender questionings.

Suddenly, he felt the vertigo of an evil temptation arise; and the effort that he made to resist it shook him with a convulsive shiver. Divonne was frightened at seeing him so pale, his teeth chattering. "Ah! the poor boy —, he has the fever —" With a gesture of unreflecting tenderness, she untied the large neckerchief that she wore so as to put it about his neck; but suddenly seized, enveloped, she felt the burning of a mad caress on her neck, her shoulders, all the sparkling flesh that had just dazzled in the sun. She had not time to cry out or to defend herself, perhaps she did not even

realize exactly what had just taken place. "Ah! I am mad ——, I am mad ——" He fled, already afar off in the copse where the stones rolled ominously under his feet.

At breakfast, on that day, Jean announced that he would leave that very evening, recalled by an order from the ministry —— "Going, already! —— you said ——, you have only just arrived ——" Then cries, entreaties. But he could remain no longer with them, since between all those tender-nesses there intervened Sapho's agitating and corrupting influence. Moreover, had he not made the greatest sacrifice to them by giving up the life with her? The complete breaking off would be accomplished a little later on; and he would then return to love without shame, without embarrassment, to embrace all those good people.

It was night, the household dark, when Césaire returned from taking his nephew to the train from Avignon. Having given oats to the horse, after having examined the sky,—that look for weather forecasts of men who live on the soil,—he was

about to go in again when he saw a white form on a terrace bench. "It is you, Divonne?"

"Yes, I was waiting for you ——"

Very busy all day, separated from her Fénat whom she adored, they had the evening for those gossiping meetings, for strolling together. Was it the brief scene between her and Jean, understood while thinking of it, and better than she would have wished, or the emotion of having seen the poor mother weep all day in silence? Her voice faltered, an extraordinary uneasiness of mind in that calm, dutiful person. "Do you know anything? Why has he left us so hurriedly? ——" She did not believe in that ministry story, suspecting rather some evil attachment that was drawing the boy far from his family. So many dangers, such fatal happenings in that Paris of perdition!

Césaire, who knew not how to conceal anything from her, acknowledged that there was indeed a woman in Jean's life, but a good creature incapable of turning him away from his people; and he spoke of her devotedness, of the touching letters that she

wrote, boasted especially of the courageous resolve that she had taken to work, which seemed quite natural to the peasant woman: "for, in fact, one must work to live."

"Not that kind of woman ——" said Césaire.

"She is, then, a hussy with whom Jean was living —— And you went there? ——"

"I swear to you, Divonne, that since she has known him there is no woman more chaste, more honest —— Love has rehabilitated her."

But the word was too long, Divonne did not understand. To her, that lady was included in that trash that she called "bad women," and she thought that her Jean was the prey of such a creature made her indignant. If the consul suspected that! ——

Césaire tried to calm her, gave assurance by all the wrinkles of his somewhat jovial good face that at the boy's age one could not do without a woman. "Well, then! let him get married," she said with affecting conviction.

"In short, they are no longer together, it is always that ——"

She then, in a grave tone: "Listen, Césaire —, you know what they say with us: Men's evil deeds live after them — If it is truly as you relate, if Jean has picked this woman up out of the gutter, he has perhaps made himself quite dirty by this sorry business. Possibly he has made her better and more honest, but who knows whether the bad that was in her has not tainted our boy to the very heart!"

They were returning toward the terrace. Peaceful and radiant night reigned over the whole silent valley, in which nothing was living but the pure light of the moon, the rolling river, the ponds like silver flakes. One breathed the calm, the remoteness of everything, the great rest of a dreamless sleep. Suddenly, the upgoing train, under full steam, with its dull rumbling, rolled along the bank of the Rhône.

"Oh! that Paris," said Divonne, pointing with her fist toward the enemy that the province burdens with all its wrath — "that Paris! — what we give you and what you return to us!"



VII

It was a cold and foggy afternoon, dark at four o'clock, even on that broad avenue of the Champs-Élysées on which the carriages were hastening with a low and deadened roll. Jean could hardly read at the farther end of a little garden whose gate was open, those gilded letters, very high, above the entresol of a house with the luxurious and quiet appearance of a cottage: *Furnished rooms, family boarding-house*. A coupé was waiting close to the sidewalk.

The office door being pushed open, Jean saw her immediately, the woman for whom he was looking, seated close by the window, turning over the leaves of a big account-book in front of another woman, elegant and tall, with a handkerchief in her hands and a small satchel.

"You desire, sir? ——" Fanny recognized him, arose, startled, and passing in front of the lady: "It is the little ——," she said, quite low. The other examined Gaussin from head to foot with the fine masterful coolness that experience gives, and quite loud, without constraint: "Embrace each other, my children —— I am not looking at you." Then she seated herself in Fanny's place, and continued to verify her figures.

They had taken hold of each other's hands, were whispering stupid phrases. "How goes it?" "Not bad, thanks ——" "Then you left yesterday evening ——" But the change in their voices gave the words their true meaning. And seated on the divan, getting somewhat reassured: "You did not recognize my mistress? ——" said Fanny in a low voice, —— "nevertheless you have already seen her —— at Déchelette's ball, as a Spanish bride —— A little the worse for the wear, the bride is."

"Then it is ——?"

"Rosario Sanchès, De Potter's woman."

This Rosario, Rosa, from her fête name written on all the night restaurant mirrors and always

underlined with some filth, was a former "chariot lady" at the Hippodrome, famous in the gay world for her cynical licentiousness, her tongue and whip-lashings, very much sought after by club men, whom she led as if they were her horses.

A Spaniard from Oran, she had been more beautiful than pretty and still enjoyed in the light a certain beauty in her black-brown eyes and her eyebrows meeting in a straight line; but here, even in this artificial light, she clearly showed her fifty years, marked on a flat, hard face, with the skin rough and yellow like a lemon of her own country. A close friend of Fanny Legrand's for years, she had directed her in gallantry, and her name alone terrified the lover.

Fanny, who understood the trembling of his arm, tried to excuse herself. To whom address herself in order to find a situation? One was greatly embarrassed. Moreover, Rosa now was keeping quiet; rich, very rich, living in her mansion in the Avenue de Villiers or in her villa at Enghien, receiving some old friends, but a single lover, always the same, her musician.

"De Potter?" Jean asked, — "I thought he was married."

"Yes —, married, children, it appears even that his wife is pretty —, it has not prevented him from returning to the old one —, and if you saw how she speaks to him, how she treats him — Ah! he is badly bitten, he is." She pressed his hand with a tender reproach. The lady at that moment interrupted her reading and turned to her bag which was dangling at the end of her girdle:

"But keep quiet, then, let us see! —" Then to the manager, in a tone of command: "Give me a piece of sugar at once for Bichito."

Fanny rose, brought the sugar and placed it near the mouth of the ridiculous thing, with a thousand flatteries, childish words — "Look at the pretty thing —," she said to her lover, pointing out to him, entirely surrounded with padding, a sort of large lizard, deformed and rough-skinned, serrated, with hooded head on trembling and gelatinous flesh; a chameleon sent to Rosa from Algeria, who preserved it against the Parisian winter

by means of care and heat. She adored it as she had never loved a man; and Jean easily recognized in Fanny's sycophantic endearments the place that the horrible beast held in the house.

The lady shut the book, ready to leave. "Not so bad for a second fortnight — Only watch over the candle."

She cast her proprietor's look around the little parlor, well-kept, in good order, with furniture in stamped velvet, blew a little dust from the yucca of the round-table, pointed out a rent in the lace curtains at the windows; after which, she said to the young folks, with an expressive glance: "You know, my little ones, no stupid things —, the house is very proper —," and re-entering the carriage that was waiting for her at the door, she went away for a drive in the Bois.

"You think it is plain sailing! —" said Fanny. "I have them on my back, her or her mother, twice a week — The mother is still more terrible, more forbidding — I must love you, see, to stay in this barracks — At last here you are, I have you again! — I have been so much

afraid ——” And she entwined him, standing, for a long time, lips to lips, assuring herself indeed by the trembling kiss that he was still entirely hers. But people were coming and going in the passage-way, it was necessary to be on their guard. When the lamp was brought, she sat in her accustomed place, a little work in her fingers; he, quite close as if on a visit ——

“Am I changed, eh? —— Am I little enough like myself? ——”

She smiled as she showed her crochet-needle handled with the awkwardness of a little girl. She had always hated needlework; a book, her piano, her cigarette, or her sleeves tucked up for the preparing of a little dish, she was never otherwise occupied. But here, what was she to do? The parlor piano she could not think of at all during the day, being obliged to stay in the office —— Romances? She knew many other stories than those which they related. For want of the prohibited cigarette, she had taken up that lace which occupied her fingers and left her free to think, understanding at that hour, women's

taste for those minor works that she formerly despised.

And whilst she was picking up her thread with awkward movements as yet, an inexperienced attention, Jean was looking at her, quite restful in her simple dress, her small standing collar, her hair quite flat on the antique roundness of her head, and her bearing so frank, so reasonable. Outside, in sumptuous adornment, was rolling continually the train of girls in the fashion, perched high on their phaëtons, going down again towards the noisy Paris of the boulevards; and Fanny did not seem to have a regret for that vice displayed and triumphant, of which she might have taken her share, which she had disdained for him. Provided that he consented to see her from time to time, she very agreeably accepted her life of servitude, found in it even amusing features.

All the boarders adored her. The women, foreigners, without any taste, consulted her as to their toilet purchases; she gave singing lessons in the morning to the eldest of the little Peruvian girls, and for the book to be read, the play to be looked

at, she advised the gentlemen, who treated her with all sorts of regards, of kindnesses, one especially, the Dutchman on the third floor. "He sits down there where you are, remains in contemplation until I say to him: 'Kuyper, you weary me!' Then he answers: 'Vell,' and he goes away — It was he who gave me this little coral brooch. You know it is worth a hundred sous; I accepted it so as to have peace."

A boy entered, brought a loaded tray which he placed on one end of the table while pushing the green plant back a little. "It is there that I eat all alone, one hour before the table-d'hôte." She pointed to two dishes of the rather long and copious bill of fare. The manager had a right only to two dishes and the soup. "Can it be that she is mean, this Rosario? — Moreover, I prefer to eat there; I have no need of speaking and I re-read your letters, which keep me company."

She stopped again to reach for a tablecloth and napkins; at every moment, some one was disturbing her: an order to be given, a wardrobe to open, a claim to satisfy. Jean understood that he was

embarrassing her by remaining longer ; then her dinner was installed, and it was so shabby, that little soup tureen containing one portion, that was smoking on the table, suggesting the same thought to both, the same regret for their former familiar chats !

“Until Sunday ——, until Sunday ——,” she murmured quite low, on dismissing him. And as they could not embrace each other because of the servants, of the boarders coming down, she had taken hold of his hand, and rested it against her heart for a long time so as to make the caress enter there.

The whole evening, at night, he thought of her, suffering from her humiliating servitude in the presence of that wretch and her big lizard ; then the Dutchman disturbed him also, and until Sunday he did not live. In reality, that half-separation which was to prepare, without a shock, for the ending of their intrigue, was to her the stroke of the pruning-knife, from which the exhausted tree revives. They wrote to each other, almost every day, letters

of tenderness such as are scrawled by impatient lovers; or perhaps it was, on leaving the ministry, a sweet chat in the office during the hour of needlework.

She had said at the house, in speaking of him: "One of my relatives ——," and under cover of this vague appellation, he could go sometimes to spend the evening in the parlor, a thousand leagues from Paris. He knew the Peruvian family with its innumerable girls, jumbled up in discordant colors, arranged around the parlor, genuine macaws on their perches; he heard Mademoiselle Minna Vogel's zither, garlanded like a hop-pole, and saw her brother, ill, voiceless, passionately following with his head the rhythm of the music and moving his fingers on an imaginary clarionet, the only one that he had permission to play. He took a hand at whist with Fanny's Dutchman, a big numskull, bald, of sordid mien, who had navigated over all the oceans of the world, and who when asked for some information about Australia, where he had just spent some months, answered with a rolling of his eyes: "Guess how much potatoes cost at

Melbourne? ——” having been struck only by this single fact, the high price of potatoes in every country to which he went.

Fanny was the soul of those assemblies, chatted, sang, played the well-informed and mundane Parisian woman; and what remained of their Bohemian or studio ways escaped these exotics, or seemed to them in the best taste. She dazzled them with her relations with the famous personalities of the arts or of literature, gave to the Russian lady, who went wild over Dejoie's works, information on the romancer's manner of writing, the number of cups of coffee that he absorbed in a night, the exact and ludicrous sum which the publishers of *Cenderinette* had paid for the masterpiece that made their fortune. And the successes of his mistress made Gaussin so proud that he forgot to be jealous, would willingly have vouched for them himself, if any one had raised a doubt about them.

Whilst he was admiring her in that peaceful parlor lighted with shaded lamps, serving the tea, accompanying the young girls' melodies, giving

them advice like a big sister, there came to him a strange incentive to picture her to himself as some one entirely different, when she reached his lodgings on Sunday morning, soaked, shivering, and when, without even approaching the fire that was blazing in her honor, she undressed in haste and slipped into the big bed, beside her lover. Then what embraces, what long caresses in which were avenged the restraints of the whole week, that privation of each other which, with their love, kept desire alive.

The hours passed, sunk into oblivion; they did not stir from their bed until evening. Nothing tempted them from there; no pleasure, no one to see, not even the Hettémas who, from economy, had decided to live in the country. The little breakfast prepared, alongside of them, they heard, deadened, the murmur of a Parisian Sunday stirring in the street, the whistling of the trains, the rumbling of the loaded hacks; and the rain in big drops on the balcony zinc, with the accelerated throbbing of their breasts, measured that absence of life, without a notion of the hour, until twilight.

The gas, which was lighted opposite, then cast a pale ray on the hangings; it was necessary to get up, Fanny having to return at seven o'clock. In the half-light of the room, all her weariness, all her heart-sores came back to her more heavy, more cruel, as she was putting on her shoes, still damp from the journey on foot, her petticoats, her office dress, the black uniform of poor women.

And what swelled her sorrow were those loved objects around her, the furniture, the little toilet cabinet of the fine days — She tore herself away: "Let us go! —" and so as to remain longer together, Jean escorted her home; pressed close together, and slowly, they went up the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, whose double row of branched lamps, with the Arc de Triomphe above, standing out in the shadow, and two or three stars marking points in the heavens, figured the basis of a diorama. At the corner of the Rue Pergolèse, quite close to the boarding-house, she raised her tiny veil for a last kiss, and left him upset, disgusted with his domicile, to which he returned as late as possible, cursing poverty, almost grudging those at Castelet

the sacrifice that he imposed on himself for their sakes.

For two or three months, they dragged out this life that had, towards the end, become absolutely unbearable, Jean having been obliged to restrict his visits to the house because of the babbling of a servant, and Fanny increasingly exasperated by the avarice of the Sanchès, mother and daughter. She thought silently of resuming their little household and felt her lover also at the end of his resistance, but she would have liked him to speak of it first.

One Sunday in April, Fanny arrived more gaily decked than usual, in a round hat, a very simple spring dress,—she was not rich,—but befitting her graceful body.

“Get up quickly, we are going to breakfast in the country ——”

“In the country! ——”

“Yes, at Enghien, at Rosa’s —— She has invited both of us ——” He said: “No!” at first, but she insisted. Never would Rosa forgive a refusal.

"You may well consent for my sake —— I am doing enough, it seems to me."

It was on the edge of the Enghien lake, at the head of an immense lawn reaching down to a little inlet where some yawls and gondolas were swaying, a large Swiss cottage, marvelously adorned and furnished, the ceilings and mirrored panels of which reflected the sparkling of the water, the superb elms of a park already trembling with early verdure and with lilacs in flower. The correct liveries, the walks on which no twig was allowed to remain, did honor to the double watching of Rosario and the old Pilar.

The folks were at table when they arrived, a false direction having led them astray around the lake, through alleys between high garden walls. Jean's discomposure was completed by the cold reception of the mistress of the house, furious that they had made her wait, and at the extraordinary aspect of the old witches, to whom Rosa presented him in her carter's voice. Three "elegants," as prominent strumpets are designated among themselves, three former rounders counting among the

glories of the Second Empire, with names as famous as that of a great poet or of a victorious general,—Wilkie Cob, Sombreuse, Clara Desfous.

Elegant, certainly they were so still, pranked in the latest fashion, in the colors of spring, exquisitely decked from collarette to shoes; but so faded, painted and powdered! Sombreuse, without eye-lashes, her eyes dead, her lips drooping, feeling around her plate for her fork, for her glass; the Desfous enormous, pimped, a hot-water bag at her feet, displaying on the tablecloth her poor gouty and twisted fingers, with sparkling rings, as difficult, as complicated to put on and take off as the rings of a puzzle. And Cob quite thin, with a youthful form that made more hideous her emaciated head like that of a sick clown under a wig of yellow tow. This one, ruined, sold-out, went to try a last chance at Monte Carlo and returned from there without a sou, madly in love with a handsome croupier who had not wanted her; Rosa, having taken her in, fed her, and gloried in it.

All those women knew Fanny, saluted her with a patronizing good-day: "How goes it, little

woman?" The fact is, that with her three-francs-a-yard dress, without a jewel except Kuyper's red brooch, she had the air of a recruit among those awe-inspiring mainstays of gallantry, which that framework of luxury, all the light reflected from the lake and from the heavens, entering, mingled with spring-time odors through the dining-room doors, made still more spectral.

There was also old dame Pilar, "the *chingé*," as she called herself in her Franco-Spanish dialect, a real baboon with faded and raspy skin, of ferocious malice on grimacing features, with gray hair, cropped close, and on her old black satin dress a large master-skipper's blue collar.

"And then Monsieur Bichito —," said Rosa, completing the presenting of her guests and showing Gaussin a pallet of red wadding, in which the chameleon was shivering on the tablecloth.

"Well, and as for me, I am not to be presented?" in a tone of forced joviality, put in a tall fellow with mustaches turning gray, of correct make-up, a little stiff, however, in his bright vest and his standing collar.

"It is true —— And Tatave!" said the women, laughing. The mistress of the house gave his name carelessly.

Tatave, that was De Potter, the learned musician, the acclaimed author of *Claudia*, of *Savonarola*; and Jean, who had only just got a glance of him at Déchelette's, was astonished to find in the great artist manners so far from genial, that hard and regular wooden mask, those colorless eyes hiding a mad, incurable passion, which for years past had bound him to that hussy, made him leave wife and children, to remain a boarder in that house in which he ingulfed a part of his large fortune, his theatre earnings, and where he was treated worse than a servant. One should see Rosa's tired air as soon as he related anything, with what a contemptuous tone she imposed silence on him; and improving upon her daughter, Pilar never failed to add in a tone of conviction:

"Give us a rest, my boy."

Jean had her as his neighbor, that Pilar, and those old ape lips that were muttering while eating, with the ruminating of a beast, that inquisitorial

glance at his plate, put on the rack, the young man already embarrassed by Rosa's patronizing tone in joking Fanny on the musical evenings at the hotel and the silliness of those poor adventurers who took the manageress for a woman of the world fallen into misfortune. The former chariot-lady, bloated with unhealthy fat, with polished stones, worth ten thousand francs, in each ear, seemed to envy her friend the renewal of youth and beauty communicated to her by that young and handsome lover; and Fanny did not get angry, on the contrary, amused the table, grinder-like, jeered at the boarders, the Peruvian who acknowledged to her, while showing the white of his eyes, his desire to know a *swell girl*, and the silent court, with the seal-like puffing of the Dutchman panting behind her chair: "Guess how much potatoes are worth at Batavia?"

Gaussin hardly laughed, not he; nor did Pilar, taken up with watching over her daughter's silverware, or darting with a sudden movement, spying on the cover in front of her or on her neighbor's sleeve, a fly that she presented while jabbering

words of tenderness : " Eat, *mi alma* ; eat, *mi corazon*," to the hideous little beast as it fell on the table-cloth, shriveled, twisted, formless as the Desfous's fingers.

Sometimes, all the flies routed, she perceived one on the sideboard or on the glass in the door, rose, and swept it off triumphantly. This proceeding, frequently repeated, made her daughter impatient, and she was decidedly very nervous that morning :

" Do not get up, then, every minute, it is fatiguing."

With the same voice pitched two tones lower, the mother replied : " You are devouring, *bos otros* ——, why do you wish that he not eat, he ?"

" Leave the table, or keep quiet ——, you are pestering us ——"

The old woman was saucy, and both began to insult each other like Spanish devotees, mingling the devil and hell with sidewalk invectives :

" *Hija del demonio.*"

" *Cucerno de Satanás.*"

" *Putá ! ——*"

" *Mi madre !*"

Jean looked at them in terror, whilst the other guests, accustomed to these family scenes, continued to eat in peace. De Potter alone interfered out of regard for the stranger :

“ Do not dispute, then, let us see.”

But Rosa, furious, turned against him : “ Why do you interfere, you ? —— What manners ! —— Am I not free to speak ? —— Go home to your wife, then, a little while, if I am —— I have enough of your fried-whiting eyes, and of the three hairs that remain to you —— Go and take them to your turkey-hen, it is high time ! ——” De Potter smiled, somewhat pale :

“ And one must live with that ! ——” he muttered through his mustache.

“ It is as good as that ——” she howled, her whole body leaning forward on the table. “ And you know, the door is open ——, file ——, skip ! ”

“ Let us see, Rosa ——,” the poor, dull eyes supplicated. And the old Pilar woman, beginning to eat again, said with such comic indifference : “ Give us a rest, my boy ! ——” that everybody

burst out laughing, even Rosa, even De Potter, who embraced his mistress while she was still scolding, and, to complete the winning of her favor, caught a fly, and holding it delicately by the wing, gave it to Bichito.

And that was De Potter, the glorious composer, the pride of the French School! How did that woman, old in debauchery and gross, keep him, by what witchery did she restrain him, she whose mother duplicated her infamy, and showed her what she herself would be twenty years later, as seen in a spherical mirror? —

The coffee was served on the lake shore, under a rock-work grotto, lined inside with bright silks that were watered by the motion of the neighboring lake; one of those delightful kissing nests invented by the story-tellers of the eighteenth century, with a glass in the ceiling that reflected the attitudes of the old Fates spread out on the broad divan in a digestive swoon, and Rosa, her cheeks burning under the paint, lying on her back, stretching out her arms to her musician :

"Oh! my Tatave ——, my Tatave! ——"

But this warmth of tenderness evaporated with that of the Chartreuse, and the idea of a trip in a boat having occurred to one of those ladies, she sent De Potter to get the canoe ready.

"The canoe, you mean, not the Norwegian."

"If I said to Désiré ——"

"Désiré is at breakfast."

"But the canoe is full of water; it has to be emptied, it is quite a labor ——"

"Jean will go with you, De Potter ——," said Fanny, who saw another scene coming.

Seated in front of each other, their legs wide apart, each on a seat of the boat, they bailed it actively, without speaking to each other, without looking at each other, as if hypnotized by the rhythm of the water thrown from the two scoops. Around them the shadow of a large catalpa fell in odorous freshness and was mirrored on the lake resplendent with light.

"Have you been long with Fanny?" suddenly asked the musician, discontinuing his task.

"Two years ——," replied Gaussin, somewhat surprised.

"Only two years! —— Then what you have seen to-day will perhaps be of service to you. As for me, it is twenty years that I have been living with Rosa, twenty years since, returning from Italy after my three years' tenure of the *Prix de Rome*, I entered the Hippodrome, one evening, and I saw her standing in her little chariot at the turning of the track, coming down on me, her whip in the air, dressed in her helmet with eight iron lance points, and her coat with golden spangles, tightly fitting her form as far as the middle of her thighs. Ah! if any one had said to me ——"

And resuming the emptying of the boat, he told how at his house they had done nothing at first but laugh at this intrigue; then the matter becoming serious, how many efforts, entreaties, sacrifices, his relatives would have made to effect a rupture. Two or three times the girl had gone away for a money consideration, but he always rejoined her. "Try traveling ——," his mother had said. He traveled, came back and resumed his life with her.

Then he consented to marry; a pretty girl, a rich dowry, the promise of a seat in the *Institut* among the wedding presents — And three months later, he gave up his new household for the old — “Ah! young man, young man! —”

He retailed his life-story in a dry voice, without a muscle animating his visage, stiff as the starched collar that held him erect. And barks were passing, laden with students and girls, overflowing with songs, with youth, laughter and intoxication; how many among those unthinking ones should have stopped and taken their stand from the frightful lesson! —

In the kiosk, during that time, as if it were a signal given to work for their separation, the old elegants were preaching reason to Fanny Legrand — “Pretty, her little man, but not a sou —, to what would it lead her? —”

“Indeed, since I love him! —”

And Rosa, shrugging her shoulders: “Let her be, then —, she is going again to miss her Dutchman as I have seen her miss all her fine chances — After her business with Flamant, she

had, however, tried to become practical ; but here she is more foolish than ever ——”

“*Ay ! vellaca ——*,” Mamma Pilar grunted.

The Englishwoman with the clown-like head interfered with the horrible accent that for so long had made her success :

“It was all very well to enjoy love, little woman ——, it was very good, love was, you know ——, but you ought to love money also —— ; as for me now, if I were always rich, would my croupier say I was ugly, do you think ? ——” She bounded with rage, raising her voice to a scream : “Oh ! it was terrible, nevertheless, that thing was —— To have been famous in the world, popular, known like a monument, like a boulevard ——, so well known that there is not a miserable coachman, who, when you said ‘Wilkie Cob !’ did not know at once where to go —— To have had princes for my footstools, and kings, who if I spat, said it was pretty—the spitting ! —— And now, there is that dirty pimp who did not want me just because of my ugliness ; and I had not the wherewith to pay my way for one night.”

And raising herself at the idea that she should be thought ugly, she opened her dress abruptly :

“The face, yes, I sacrificed that ; but the throat, the shoulders —— Are they white ? are they firm ? ——”

She immodestly exposed her bewitching flesh, that had remained miraculously young after being thirty years in the furnace, but was now surmounted by a head that was withered and sorry from the line of the neck.

“Ladies, the boat is ready ! ——” exclaimed De Potter ; and the Englishwoman, fastening her dress on what remained to her of youth, murmured in a comic fit of distress :

“I could not, however, go out in public quite nude ! ——”

In that Lancret landscape, where the coquettish whiteness of the villas glistened amid the fresh verdure, with those terraces, those lawns framing the little lake all flecked with sunshine, what an embarkation was that of all these old limping Venuses ; the blind Sombreuse and the old clown

and Desfous the paralytic, leaving in the furrow of the water the musky perfume of their painted faces!

Jean held the oars, his back bent, ashamed and wretched lest some one should see him and attribute to him some base function in that sinister allegorical bark. Fortunately he had Fanny Legrand in front of him, to refresh his heart and eyes; she was seated in the stern, near the rudder that was held by De Potter, Fanny whose smile had never appeared to him so fresh, due no doubt to the comparison.

"Sing us something, little woman —," asked the Desfous whom the spring was softening. In her expressive and deep voice, Fanny began the boat-song of *Claudia* which the composer, moved by this reminder of his first great success, followed by imitating with his closed mouth the orchestral accompaniment, that undulation which, as it were, makes the light of dancing water play through the melody. At that hour, mid that scenery, it was delightful. From a neighboring terrace some one called "bravo;" and the Provençal, pulling the oars to the time, was thirsty for that divine music

Chapter VIII

Romantic or not, she was in consternation in the evening, on her knees, a plate of soup in her hand, trying to win over the little Morvandian fellow, who, standing in a receding pose, his head bent, an enormous head with hair like hemp, energetically refused to talk, to eat, even to show his face, and repeated in a choking and monotonous voice :







on his mistress's lips, tempting him to apply his mouth to the spring, and, with his head thrown back, still to drink in the sunshine.

Suddenly Rosa, furious, interrupted the melody whose blending tones were irritating her : " Hey ! down there, songster, when you have finished cooing figuratively — Do you think that that funeral romance of yours is amusing us — That's enough of it — In the first place it is late, Fanny must return to the box — "

And with a wild gesture, pointing to the nearest landing-place :

" Land there —," she said to her lover, " they will be nearer to the railroad station — "

It was as brutal as a dismissal ; but the former chariot-lady had accustomed her people to such manners, and no one dared protest. The couple cast on the shore with a few words of cold politeness to the young man, then orders to Fanny in a hissing voice, and the barque moved away loaded with exclamations, with a train of dispute that was ended by an insulting outburst of laughter borne to the two lovers over the echoing water.

"You hear, you hear," said Fanny, pale with rage, "it is at us that she is gibing ——"

And all her humiliations, all her rancors coming back to her at that last insult, she enumerated them on her way back to the station, even acknowledged things that she had always concealed. Rosa was seeking only to alienate her from him, only to facilitate opportunities for deceiving him. "All that she has said to induce me to take that Dutchman —— A little while ago, too, they all set about it —— I love you too much, you understand, she is troubled about her vices, for she has them all, the vilest, the most monstrous. And it is because I no longer wish ——"

She stopped, seeing that he was very pale, his lips trembling, as on the evening when he stirred up the foul heap of letters.

"Oh! fear nothing," she said, "your love has healed me of all those horrors —— She and her plague of a chameleon both disgust me."

"I do not wish you to remain there any longer," remarked the lover, maddened with

insane jealousies — “There is too much of taint in the way you earn your bread; you will return with me, we shall always get along together.”

She was waiting for that, she had been coaxing for that call for some time. Yet she resisted, objecting that in housekeeping, with the three hundred francs from the bureau, life would be very difficult, that it would perhaps be necessary to separate again — “And I suffered so much on leaving our poor house! —”

Benches were placed at intervals under the acacias that border the road along which were telegraph wires loaded with swallows; the better to chat, they sat down, both much affected, their arms linked.

“Three hundred francs a month,” said Jean, “but how do the Hettémas get along when they have only two hundred and fifty? —”

“They live in the country, at Chaville, all the year.”

“Well, let us do like them, I am not bound to Paris.”

“ True ? —— you really mean it ? —— ah ! my love, my love ! —— ”

People were passing on the road, and galloping asses were carrying a to-morrow's wedding-party. They could not embrace, and remained motionless, pressed closely to each other, dreaming of a happiness rejuvenated during summer evenings whose rural softness and warm calm would be relieved by distant carbine shots, and the organ voluntaries of a suburban feast.

VIII

They were installed at Chaville, between the upper and the lower country, along that old forest road which is called *Le Pavé des Gardes*, in a former hunting-box, at the entrance to the woods; three rooms hardly larger than those at Paris, with their furniture for a small household still, the cane armchair, the painted wardrobe, and nothing to adorn the frightful green paper of their room but Fanny's portrait, for the photograph of Castelet had had its frame broken during the moving and was growing faded in the loft.

They hardly spoke now of that poor Castelet since the uncle and the niece had broken off their correspondence. "A fine, careless sort of fellow —," she said, recalling *Le Fénat's* readiness in protecting the first rupture. Only the little ones supplied their brother with news, for *Divonne*

no longer wrote. Perhaps she still kept ill-will against her nephew; or she guessed that the wicked woman had returned to open and comment on her poor maternal letters written in large peasant characters.

At moments they might have believed themselves in the Rue d'Amsterdam still, but they awoke with the song of the Hettémas, who had again become their neighbors, and with the whistling of the trains that were continually passing each other on the other side of the road, visible through the trees of a large park. But instead of the dull glass of the Gare de l'Ouest, of its uncurtained windows showing the stooping shadows of the officials, and of the sonorous hubbub on the sloping street, they relished the silent and green space beyond their little orchard surrounded by other gardens, by cottages amid clumps of trees, running down to the foot of the hillside.

In the morning, before setting out, Jean breakfasted in their little dining-room, the window open on that broad paved road, overgrown with grass, bordered by whitethorn hedges with penetrating

perfumes. It was by that way that he went to the railroad station in ten minutes, going along the rustling and melodious park; and, when he returned, that noise became appeased in proportion as the shadow came out from the copse over the moss on the empurpled green road toward the west, and as the calls of the cuckoos at every corner of the wood were mingled with the trills of the nightingale in the ivies.

But as soon as the first installation was made and the surprise of that hushing of the things around him was over, the lover was again seized with his tortures of sterile and investigating jealousy. His mistress's quarreling with Rosa and the departure from the hotel had brought on between the two women an explanation with a monstrous double meaning, reviving his suspicions, his most disturbing uneasiness; and when he left, when from the car he saw their low house, a ground floor surmounted by a round skylight, his glance was exploring the wall. He said to himself: "Who knows?" and that idea pursued him even among the documents of his office.

On returning, he made her give an account of her day, of her most trifling doings, of her concerns, most frequently indifferent, which he entrapped with a "What are you thinking of? — at once —," always fearing lest she was regretting something or someone of that horrible past, confessed by her each time with the same frankness that was not to be disconcerted.

At least, when they saw each other only on Sunday, greedy for each other, he did not take time for these moral, outrageous and minute searches. But when brought together, with the continuity of their blended lives, they tortured each other even in their caresses, in their most intimate embraces, agitated with mute wrath, with the painful feeling of the irreparable: he, becoming exhausted in his desire to bring about in her, surfeited as she was with love, a feeling of which she was yet ignorant; she, ready for martyrdom in order to give a joy which could not have been found in ten others, and not succeeding, weeping in impotent rage.

Then a relaxation took place; perhaps the satiety of the senses in the warm surroundings of

nature, or, more simply, the proximity of the Hettémas. It was because, of all the households encamped in the suburbs of Paris, not one, perhaps, ever enjoyed rural liberty as that one did, the pleasure of going out clad in tatters, hooded with bark caps, Madame without a corset, Monsieur in sandals; of taking crumbs to the ducks, pickings to the rabbits on leaving table, then hoeing, raking, grafting, watering.

Oh! the watering ——

The Hettémas set about it as soon as the husband, on his return, exchanged his office costume for a Robinson Crusoe vest; after dinner, they took to it again, and long after night had come, in the darkness of the little garden from which a fresh vapor ascended from the humid earth, one heard the creaking of the pump, the dashing of the large sprinklers, and heavy pantings among the flower-beds, with a trickling that seemed to be falling from the toilers' brows into their watering cans, then from time to time a triumphant exclamation:

"I have put thirty-two on the gluttonous peas! ——"

“And I fourteen on the balsams! ——”

Folks who were not satisfied with being happy, but who saw each other's happiness, and smacked their lips, as it were, so as to make one's mouth water; the man especially, by the irresistible way in which he related the joys of a winter spent together:

“It is nothing now, but you will see in December! —— One comes in dirty, wet, with all the worrying things of Paris on his back; one finds a good fire, a good lamp, soup giving out a savory odor, under the table a pair of clogs filled with straw. No, you see, when one has stuffed one's self with a dishful of cabbage and sausages, a quarter of Swiss cheese kept fresh under linen, when one has poured over it a quart of new sour wine that did not come by way of Bercy, free of baptism and of duty, how good it is to draw one's armchair close to the fire, to light a pipe, while drinking one's coffee flavored with a brandy caramel, and to snooze opposite each other, whilst the rime drips on the window-panes —— Oh! quite a short nap, that's time to let the greater part of digestion take its course ——

Afterward one sketches for a moment, the wife clears the table, makes her little fuss, the bed covering, the hot-water bottle, and when she is lying in bed, the place warm, one falls in a heap, and it sends a warmth through your whole body as if one had nestled in the straw in one's clogs ——”

He was becoming almost eloquent from the reality of his comfort, was that shaggy giant with heavy jaw, ordinarily so timid that he could not say two words without blushing and stammering.

That wild timidity, contrasting comically with that black beard and his colossal spreading, had brought about his marriage and the quietude of his life. At twenty-five, overflowing with vigor and health, Hettéma was ignorant of love and of woman, when one day, at Nevers, after a repast with a company, comrades dragged him half-drunk into a brothel and obliged him to take his choice. He left there upset, returned, chose the same one always, paid her debts, took her away, and being frightened at the idea that someone could take her from him, and that it would be necessary to make a new conquest, he concluded to marry her.

"A lawful household, my dear ——," said Fanny with a triumphant laugh at Jean, who was listening in terror —— "And of all those that I have known, it is the most decent, the most proper."

She so expressed herself in the sincerity of her ignorance, the lawful households into which she had been able to penetrate no doubt meriting no other judgment; and all her notions of life were as false and sincere as that one.

Of a calming neighborliness were those Hettémas, of an ever uniform mood, capable even of services not too upsetting, having especially a horror of scenes, of quarrels in which it is necessary to take sides, and, in general, of everything that can disturb a good digestion. The woman tried to initiate Fanny into the raising of chickens and rabbits, into the healthy pleasures of watering, but to no purpose.

Gaussin's mistress, a suburbanite familiar with the studios, liked the country only by fits and starts, for parties, as a place where one can enjoy noisy mirth, rolling about and forgetting one's self

with one's lover. She detested effort, work ; and her six months of management having for a long time exhausted her active faculties, she became enfeebled in a vague torpor, an intoxication of enjoyment and of open air that almost deprived her of the strength to dress herself, to arrange her hair, or even to open her piano.

The care of their interior being left entirely to a country housekeeper, at evening, when she summed up her day's doings to tell Jean of them, she found nothing but a visit to Olympe, gossipings over the fence, and cigarettes, heaps of cigarettes whose remains soiled the marble in front of the fireplace. Six o'clock already ! — Hardly time to change her dress, to pin a flower in her bosom in order to go to meet him on the green road —

But with the fogs, the autumn rains, the night falling early, she had more than one pretext for not going out ; and often, on returning, he caught her unawares in one of those white woolen *gandouras* with large folds, that she had put on in the morning, her hair gathered up as it was when he had left. He considered her charming thus, her

nape remaining young, her tempting and well-cared-for flesh which he found quite ready, unshackled. Nevertheless, that falling away shocked him, frightened him as if it were a danger.

He himself, after a great effort at work in order to increase their resources a little without having recourse to Castelet, after vigils spent on plans, reproductions of pieces of artillery, covered gun-carriages, guns of a new pattern that he was designing on Hettéma's account, felt himself seized, all of a sudden, by that enervating influence of the country and of solitude to which the strongest and most active become victims, the numbing influence of which had been planted in him by his early childhood spent in a remote corner of nature.

And the materiality of their big neighbors aiding, communicating itself to them in perpetual goings and comings from one house to the other, with a little of their moral debasement and their monstrous appetite, Gaussin and his mistress came also to discussing gravely the question of repasts and the hour for going to bed. Césaire having sent a butt of his frog wine, they spent a whole

Sunday in bottling it, the door of their little cellar being open to the last sun of the year, to a blue sky over which ran rosy clouds, the rosiness of heather in the woods. It was not far from the hour for the clogs filled with warm straw, nor from that for their little nap, one on each side of a log fire. Happily, a distraction came to them.

He found her one evening very much affected. Olympe had just told her the story of a poor little child, brought up at Le Morvan by a grandmother. The father and the mother in Paris, dealers in wood, no longer wrote, nor had they paid anything for months past. The grandmother having died suddenly, lightermen had brought the toddler by way of the Yonne canal to give it back to its parents ; but they were no longer there. The wood-yard closed, the mother gone off with a lover, the father a drunkard, a bankrupt, a refugee — Lawful households get on well ! — And there was the poor little fellow, six years old, a darling, without bread or clothing, in the street.

She was moved even to tears, then all of a sudden :

"Suppose we take him ——, will you?"

"What folly!"

"Why? ——" And, quite close, wheedling him :
"You know how I have desired a child by you ;
we would bring that one up, we would instruct
him. Those little ones that one picks up, in the
course of time one loves as if they were one's
own ——"

She also dwelt upon the distraction that it
would be to her, alone all day, stupidly turning
over crowds of paltry ideas. A child is a safe-
guard. Then, seeing him frightened at the ex-
pense: "But it is nothing, the expense isn't ——
Think, then, six years old! —— we will clothe
him with your old duds —— Olympe, who under-
stands it, assured me that we would not even
notice it."

"Why does not she take him, then?" said Jean,
with the bad humor of a man who feels himself
conquered by his own weakness. He tried, never-
theless, to resist, with the aid of this decisive
argument: "And when I shall be here no
longer? ——" He rarely spoke of that departure

so as not to sadden Fanny, but was thinking of it, was assuring himself of it against the dangers of housekeeping and De Potter's sad confidences. "What a complication that child would be in the future ——"

Fanny's eyes were veiled :

"You are mistaken, my friend, there would be someone to whom to speak of you, a consolation, a responsibility also that would give me the strength to work, to resume a taste for life ——"

He reflected for a minute, pictured her all alone, in the empty house :

"Where is that little fellow?"

"At Bas-Meudon, with a lighterman who took him in for a few days —— After that, the alms-house, public charity."

"Well, go and get him, since you are so determined ——"

She sprang on his neck, and, in a childish glee all evening, played, sang, happy, exuberant, transfigured. Next day, on the train, Jean spoke of their decision to big Hettéma, who seemed to be informed of the affair, but was desirous of not

mixing in it. Buried in his corner and absorbed in the reading of the *Petit Journal*, he stammered from behind his beard:

"Yes, I know —, it is those ladies —, it does not concern me —" And showing his head above the unfolded sheet: "Your wife seems to me very romantic," he said.

Romantic or not, she was in consternation in the evening, on her knees, a plate of soup in her hand, trying to win over the little Morvandian fellow, who, standing in a receding pose, his head bent, an enormous head with hair like hemp, energetically refused to talk, to eat, even to show his face, and repeated in a choking and monotonous voice:

"To see Ménine, to see Ménine."

"Ménine, that's his grandmother, I think — For two hours past, I could get nothing else from him."

Jean also tried to prevail upon him to swallow his soup, but without success. And they remained there, both kneeling at his height, one holding the plate, the other the spoon, as if in front of a sick

lamb, repeating encouragements, words of tenderness in order to win him over.

"Let us sit down at table, perhaps we are frightening him; he will eat when we are not looking at him ——"

But he continued to keep himself motionless, amazed, repeating his wail of a little savage: "To see *Ménine*," which was rending their heart, until he had gone asleep, standing against the sideboard, and so soundly that they were able to undress him, to put him to bed in a heavy country *crib* borrowed from a neighbor, without his opening his eyes for a second.

"See how handsome he is ——," said Fanny, quite proud of her acquisition; and she forced Gaussin to admire that headstrong brow, those fine and delicate traits under a sunburnt face, that perfection of a little body, the broad back, full arms, legs lithe as those of a little faun, long and sinewy, already downy in the lower part. She forgot herself while contemplating that childish beauty.

"Cover him, then, he will get cold ——," said Jean, whose voice made her jump, as if startled

out of a dream ; and whilst she approached him tenderly, the little fellow heaved long, sobbing sighs, a surge of despair in spite of sleep.

At night, he began to talk to himself :

“*Guerlaude mé — Ménine —*”

“What is he saying ? — Listen —”

He wanted to be *guerlaudé* ; but what did that patois signify ? Jean, at all events, stretched out his arm and set the heavy crib in motion ; as the child became calm, he went to sleep again holding in his fat, dimpled little hand, the hand that he thought to be that of his “*Ménine*,” dead a fortnight ago.

He was like a wild cat in the house, that clawed, bit, ate apart from the others, and growled when any one approached its porringer ; the few words that could be drawn from him were in the barbarous dialect of the Morvan woodmen, which, but for the Hettémas, who were from the same country as he, no one would have been able to understand. Nevertheless, by means of good care, of gentleness, they succeeded in taming him a little, “*un pso*,” as he said. He consented to

change the tatters in which he had been brought, for warm and clean garments, the touch of which, for the first few days, made him "querrier" with rage, like a veritable jackal that one tried to muffle up in a greyhound's covering. He learned to eat at table, to use a fork and a spoon, and to answer, when they asked him his name, that 'in the country "i li dision Josaph."

As for giving him the slightest elementary notions, it must not yet be thought of. Brought up in the midst of a wood, in a charcoal burner's hut, the uproar of a noisy and swarming nature haunted his hard little woodman's noddle, as the sound of the sea haunts the spiral of a shell; and no effort could make it receive aught else, or keep him in the house, even in the severest weather. In rain, in snow, when the bare trees stood up like rimed coral, he escaped, tramped through the shrubbery, explored the burrows with the adroit cruelties of a hunting-ferret, and when he returned, quelled by hunger, there were always in his now tattered fustian jacket, in the pocket of his little pantaloons dirty up to his belly, some stunned or dead

animal, a bird, a mole, a field mouse, or failing these, beetroots or potatoes pulled up in the fields.

Nothing could overcome these poaching and looting instincts, combined with a rustic's mania for burying in the ground all sorts of trifling, glittering articles, copper buttons, jet beads, chocolate wrappers of tin-foil, which Josaph gathered with clenched hand, and carried away to his thieving magpie hiding-places. To him all that booty assumed a vague and generic name, provisions, —denrées,—(which he pronounced *denraie*); and neither reasonings nor blows could stop him from securing his *denraie* at the expense of everything and of everybody.

The Hettémas alone kept him in his place, the designer having within reach of his hand, on his table around which roved the little savage attracted by the compasses and the colored pencils, a dog-whip that he cracked about his legs. But neither Jean nor Fanny had used such threats, though the little fellow had shown himself, toward them, sullen, distrustful, untractable even by tender spoilings, as if the *Ménine*, in dying, had deprived him

of all tender expansion. Fanny, "because she smelled agreeable," even succeeded in keeping him a moment on her knees, while as for Gaussin, though he was very gentle with him, he was always the wild beast as at first, with the distrustful look, the outstretched claws.

This invincible and almost instinctive repulsion of the child, the curious malice of his little blue eyes with albino lashes, and especially Fanny's blind and sudden tenderness for this stranger all at once falling into their life, disturbed the lover with a new suspicion. He was perhaps her child, brought up by a nurse or at her stepmother's; and Machaume's death, heard of about that time, seemed a coincidence to justify his torture. Sometimes, at night, when he held that little hand which clutched at his own,—for the child in the oblivion of sleep and dreaming, always thought he was extending it to *Ménine*,—he interrogated him about his whole inward and unspoken trouble: "Where do you come from? Who are you?" hoping to learn the secret of his birth from the heat communicated by the little being.

But his uneasiness stopped at a word from old Legrand, who came to ask them to assist in paying for a cortége for his deceased wife, and who exclaimed to his daughter on noticing Josaph's crib:

"See! a youngster! — you ought to be satisfied! — You who have never been able to get one."

Gaussin was so happy that he paid for the cortége without asking to see the estimate, and kept old Legrand to breakfast.

Employed on the tramway from Paris to Versailles, saturated with wine, and apoplectic, but always fresh and of fine mien under his waterproof leather hat, surrounded for the occasion with a heavy crape band that made it a mute's correct headgear, the old driver seemed delighted with the reception given him by his daughter's gentleman, and returned from time to time to eat soup with them. His buffoon's white hair on his shaven and swollen face, his majestic tipsy airs, the respect that he had for his whip, the posing, the sinking into a safe corner with a nurse's

precaution, made a considerable impression on the child; and immediately the old man and he were very intimate. One day as they were all together finishing dinner, the Hettémas came to surprise them :

“Ah ! pardon, you have a family gathering ——,” the woman remarked with affectation, and the expression humiliated Jean, as if he had been struck straight in the face by a blow.

His family ! —— That foundling who was snoring with his head on the tablecloth, that old, brain-softened pirate, with his pipe in the corner of his mouth, with his husky voice, explaining for the hundredth time that two sous’ worth of whip-cord lasted him six months, and that, for twenty years past, he had not changed a handle ! —— His family, come, then ! —— no more than she was his wife, that Fanny Legrand, aging and worn out, listlessly leaning on her elbows, enveloped in the smoke of her cigarettes —— Within a year all that would disappear from his life, like the chance associates of travel and table-d’hôte companions.

But at other moments, that idea of departure which he invoked as an excuse for his weakness as soon as he felt himself failing and dragged down, instead of reassuring and comforting him, made him feel the multiple bonds clasped around him; what a tearing would be that departure, not one breaking off, but ten, and what it would cost him to give up that little child's hand which at night abandoned itself to his. Even to La Balue, the oriole whistling and singing in its cage that was too small, that they were always going to change for it and in which it curved its back like the old cardinal in his iron prison; yes, La Balue itself had taken a small corner of his heart, and it would be a suffering to remove it from there.

Nevertheless, that inevitable separation was approaching; and the splendid month of June, which put nature in festal garb, would probably be the last that they would spend together. Was it that that made her nervous, irritable, or was it Josaph's education undertaken with a sudden ardor, to the great trouble of the little fellow from Morvan who remained for hours over his letters, without

seeing them or pronouncing them, his brow closed with a bar like a farmyard gate? From day to day that woman's character showed itself in acts of violence and in weepings, in scenes incessantly renewed, though Gaussin was studiously indulgent; but she was so insulting, there flowed from her wrath such rancor and hate against her lover's youth, his education, his family, against the breach that life was to widen between their destinies, and she understood so well how to sting him in the most sensitive points, that he at last became enraged and retorted.

But in his wrath there was a reserve, a well-bred man's pity, and blows that he did not inflict, because of their being too painful and too easily placed, while she gave way to all a prostitute's fits of rage, without responsibility, without shame, and made a weapon of everything, with a cruel joy noting on her victim's countenance the contraction from the suffering that she occasioned, then suddenly falling into his arms and imploring his pardon.

The faces of the Hettémas, witnesses of those quarrels breaking out nearly always at table, at the

moment of sitting down and beginning, of uncovering the soup tureen or of putting the knife in the roast, was a subject for a picture. Over the laid table, they exchanged a look of comic horror. Could one eat, or was the leg of mutton going to fly through the garden with the dish, the gravy and the bean stew?

"Above all no scene! ——" they said, each time that it was a question of coming together; and this was the phrase with which they greeted an invitation to breakfast in the forest, which Fanny jerked at them one Sunday over the wall —— Oh! no, they would not wrangle to-day, the weather was too pleasant! —— And she ran to dress the child and fill the baskets.

Everything was ready, they were setting out, when the postman brought a registered letter, the receipting for which kept Gaussin behind. He rejoined the party at the entrance to the wood, and said in a low voice to Fanny:

"It is from my uncle —— He is delighted —— A superb harvest, sold as it stands —— He sends back Déchelette's eight thousand francs, with many compliments and thanks to his niece."

"Yes, his niece! — in the Gascon fashion — Old chouse —," said Fanny, who hardly preserved any of her illusions for Southern uncles; then, quite joyously:

"We shall have to invest that money —"

He looked at her stupefied, having always known her to be very scrupulous on questions of financial probity —

"To invest? — but it is not yours —"

"Wait, in fact, I did not tell you —" She blushed, with that look which grew dull at the slightest deviation from the truth — That good fellow Déchelette, having learned what they were doing for Josaph, had written to her that this money would help them to rear the little fellow. "But you know, if it annoys you, his eight thousand francs will be returned to him; he is in Paris —"

The voice of the Hettémas, who had discreetly gone ahead, resounded under the trees:

"To the right or to the left?"

"To the right, to the right —, to the Ponds! —" Fanny exclaimed; then, turning

towards her lover: "Let us see, you are not going to begin again to worry your life out on account of foolish trifles ——, we have been long domesticated, the deuce we have! ——"

She knew that quivering paleness of his lips, that glance at the little fellow, interrogating him from head to foot; but this time it was only a slight inclination to jealous violence. He had now become cowardly from habit, and made concessions for the sake of peace. "What is the need of torturing me, of going to the bottom of things? —— If this child be hers, what is simpler than that she has taken him, concealing the truth from me, after all the scenes, the questionings that I have made her undergo? —— Is it not better to accept what is and to spend in peace the few months that remain to us? ——"

And along the paths made beauteous by the bordering trees he went away carrying the canteen breakfast in his heavy basket covered with a white cloth, resigned, weary, with his back bent like that of an old gardener, whilst in front of him the mother and the child walked together, Josaph

in his Sunday best and awkward in a *Belle Jardinière* full suit which kept him from running, she in a bright dressing gown, her head and neck bare, shaded by a Japanese parasol, her figure grown stout, her walk feeble, and in her fine plaited hair a large white lock that she no longer took the trouble to conceal.

Ahead and further down, the Hettémas were sinking in a slope of the path, gigantic straw hats on their heads like those of Tuareg horsemen, clad in red flannel, loaded with victuals, fishing tackle, nets and crab traps, and the woman, in order to lighten her husband, valiantly carrying crosswise on her colossal breast the hunting horn, without which no forest ramble was possible to the designer. While walking, the couple sang:

“I like to hear the rhythmic fall
Of oars on evening tide;
I love to hear the wild stag’s call ——”

Olympe’s repertory was inexhaustible in those street sentimentalities; and when one considered

where she had picked them up, in what shameful half-shadow of lowered shades, to how many men she had sung them, the serenity of the husband accompanying in thirds assumed an extraordinary grandeur. The grenadier's phrase at Waterloo: "They are too ——," must have been that of this man's philosophic indifference.

While Gaussin was dreamily looking at the huge couple penetrating into a hollow of the dale whither he himself undertook to follow them, a rumble of wheels was heard along the alley, and an outburst of wild laughter, of childish voices; and suddenly there appeared, at a few steps from him, a load of little girls, with ribbons and hair flowing, in an English wagon drawn by a small donkey, which a young girl, hardly older than the others, was leading by the bridle along that difficult road.

It was easily seen that Jean made one of the party whose eccentric get-up, and especially that of the big lady girdled with a hunting horn, had animated the little party with irrepressible mirth; and so the eldest girl tried to impose silence on the children for a minute. But that new Tuareg

hat only made their mocking wildness break out more vigorously, and while passing in front of the man, who stepped aside to let the little wagon go by, a pretty and somewhat embarrassed smile besought his pardon and indicated an unaffected astonishment at finding that the old gardener's face was so sweet and so young.

He saluted timidly, blushed without clearly knowing why he felt ashamed, and the team stopping at the top of the hill at a crossroads, with a prattling of childish voices that were reading aloud the names on the sign-post that were half effaced by the rain — *Way to the Ponds, Great Hunter's Oak, False Rest, Road to Vélizy* — Jean turned around to see disappear, in the green alley sparkling with sunshine and carpeted with moss, where the wheels rolled on velvet, that whirlwind of fair youth, that wagon-load of happiness, with its colors of spring, and laughter in volleys sounding under the branches.

Hettéma's horn, furiously blown, suddenly banished his dream. They were installed by the edge of the pond, in the act of unpacking the provisions ;

and from afar they saw reflected in the clear water the white table-cloth on the close-cut grass, and the red flannel blouses shining on the verdure, like huntsmen's jackets.

"Come here, then ——, it is you that have the lobster," the fat man exclaimed; and Fanny's nervous voice :

"It was the little Bouchereau girl that stopped you on the way? ——"

Jean jumped at that name of Bouchereau, which brought him back to Castelet, beside his sick mother's bed.

"Yes, indeed," said the designer, as he took the basket from her hands. "The tall one, she who led, is the doctor's niece —— His brother's daughter whom he has taken into his family. They live at Vélizy during the summer. She is pretty."

"Oh! pretty ——, the brazen-faced look especially ——" And Fanny, cutting the bread, was watching her lover, uneasy at his distracted look.

Madame Hettéma, very serious, unpacking the ham, was loudly blaming that way of letting young

girls run at liberty through the woods. "You will tell me that it is the English fashion, and that this one was brought up in London ——, but all the same, truly, it is not proper."

"No, but very convenient for adventures!"

"Oh! Fanny ——"

"Excuse me, I forgot ——, the gentleman believes in the innocents ——"

"Let us see, suppose we lunch ——," remarked Hettéma, who was beginning to be frightened. But she had to tell everything that she knew about fashionable misses. She had pretty stories about them ——, convents, boarding-schools, it was the proper thing —— They left there exhausted, blighted, with a dislike for men; not even capable of having children. "And it is then that they give them to you, a crowd of dupes! —— An innocent girl! —— As if there were innocent ones; as if, whether of social standing or not, all girls did not know, from birth, whence they come —— As for me, in the first place, at twelve I no longer had anything to learn ——, nor had you either, had you, Olympe?"

"Nat'rally ——," said Madame Hettéma with a shrug of her shoulders; but the fate of the lunch was especially concerning her, as she heard Gaussin, who arose, declare that there were girls and girls, and that one would still find in families ——"

"Ah! yes, the family," his mistress rejoined with an air of contempt, "let us speak of it ——; especially yours."

"Silence —— I forbid you ——"

"Sordid wretch!"

"Miserable creature! Happily, it is coming to an end —— I have not much longer to live with you ——"

"Go, go, clear out, it is I that will be satisfied ——"

They insulted each other face to face, in the presence of the evil curiosity of the child who was lying flat on his belly on the grass, when a frightful horn-blast, repeated a hundred times in echo by the pond and the rising slopes of the wood, suddenly drowned their quarrel.

“Have you had enough of it? — Do you want more?” and red, his neck swollen, the fat Hettéma, having found only this way of keeping them silent, was waiting, the mouthpiece to his lips, for the menacing signal.



IX

Usually, their fits of anger were but transient, being dispelled by a little music, by Fanny's wheedling effusions ; but, this time, his anger was serious, and for several days in succession he kept the same frown on his brow, the same rancorous silence, going to work at his designing immediately after his meals, and refusing, on every occasion, to go out with her.

It was, as it were, a sudden shame at the low life he was leading, the fear of again meeting the little wagon going up the path and that limpid, youthful smile of which he was constantly thinking. Then, with the confusion of a passing dream, of a view that is disturbed for the changes of a fairy scene, the apparition became mixed, was lost in its woody distance, and Jean did not see it again. Only, there remained to him a background of sadness whose

cause Fanny thought she knew, and she resolved to be satisfied.

"It is done," she said to him one day, quite cheerfully — "I have seen Déchelette — I have given the money back to him — He finds, as you do, that this is more proper; I ask myself why, indeed — In fact, that's how it is — Later on, when I shall be alone, he will think of the little fellow — Are you satisfied? — Are you angry with me still?"

And she told him of her visit to the Rue de Rome, of her astonishment at finding, instead of the noisy and mad caravansary, with its raving crowds, a peaceful middle-class house, guarded by very strict orders. No more gala days, no more masked balls; and the explanation of this change was found in the words that some discarded and furious parasite had written in chalk at the little entrance to the studio: "*Closed pour cause de collage.*"

"And it is the truth, my dear — Déchelette, on his arrival, took up with a skating-rink girl, Alice Doré; he has taken her with him, for a

month past living with him, absolutely living with him — A very sweet, a very gentle little woman, a pretty lamb — They hardly make any noise between them — I promised that we would go and see them; it will be somewhat of a change for us from the hunting-horn and the boat songs — It is all the same, you may say, the philosopher with his theories — No to-morrow, no intimacy — Ah! I teased him finely!”

Jean allowed himself to be taken to Déchelette's; he had not seen him since their meeting at the Madeleine. He would have been greatly surprised, then, to be told that the time would come when he would frequently, and without disgust, visit that cynical and disdainful lover of his mistress, would, in fact, become almost his friend. From the first visit, he was himself astonished to feel so much at ease, delighted by the gentleness of that man with the hearty, childish laugh in his Cossack beard, and of a serenity of temper that was not changed by the cruel liver ailment that gave a leaden tint to his complexion, and the circle around his eyes.

And how well people understood the tenderness with which he inspired this Alice Doré, with her long, soft and white hands, her insignificant fair beauty, which was relieved by the brightness of her Flemish skin, as golden as her name; gold in her hair, in her eyes, fringing her eyelashes, spangling her skin even under her nails.

Picked up by Déchelette from the asphalt of the skating-rink, amid the coarseness, the brutalities of the rounds, the wreaths of smoke that a man blows out in the harlot's painted face while stating a price, this man's politeness had touched and surprised her. She found herself a woman once more, instead of the poor pleasure-beast that she was, and when he wanted to send her away again in the morning, in conformity with his principles, with a good breakfast and a few louis, she had such a big heart, said to him so sweetly, so desiringly: "Keep me longer —," that he did not feel he had the courage to refuse. After that, half from human respect, half from lassitude, he kept his door closed on that chance honeymoon, which he

spent in the freshness and peace of his summer palace, so well arranged with a view to comfort; and they lived thus very happily, she in the tender regard that she had never known, he in the happiness that he gave to that poor being and in her unaffected gratitude, undergoing also without taking account of it, and for the first time, the penetrating charm of a woman's intimacy, the mysterious witchery of a life for two, in the congenial atmosphere of goodness and gentleness.

To Gaussin, the Rue de Rome studio was a diversion from the low and mean surroundings in which he dragged out his life as a minor employee maintaining a make-believe household; he liked the conversation of that scholar with artistic tastes, of that philosopher in a Persian robe, light and loose as his doctrine, those stories of travel that Déchelette sketched with the fewest possible words that were so well in place amid Oriental hangings, gilded Buddhas, bronze chimeras, the exotic luxury of that immense hall into which the daylight fell from lofty windows, a veritable lighting in the depths of a park, the light kept shifting by slender

bamboo foliage, palms interspersed with arborescent ferns, and the enormous leaves of the stillingias mingled with philodendrons with their slender flexibility, like water-plants, seeking shade and moisture.

On Sunday especially, with that broad bay window overlooking a deserted street of Paris in summer, the shivering of the leaves, the odor of the fresh earth at the stalks of the plants, it was country and shade almost as much as at Chaville, minus the promiscuousness of the Hettémas and their horn. No one ever came; once, however, Gaussin and his mistress on arriving for dinner, as soon as they entered, heard several animated voices. The day was declining, they were drinking applejack in the conservatory, and the discussion seemed lively:

“And as for me, I find that five years in Mazas, one’s name lost, one’s life ruined, is dear enough to pay for a fit of passion and folly — I will sign your petition, Déchelette.”

“It is Caoudal —,” said Fanny, quite low, and starting.

Some one answered with the crushing dryness of a refusal: "As for me, I sign nothing, accepting no responsibility with that rogue ——"

"La Gournerie, now ——" And Fanny, pressed against her lover, murmured: "Let us get away, if it annoys you to see them ——"

"Why so? oh, not at all ——" In reality, he did not well consider the impression that he would receive on finding himself face to face with those men, but he did not want to recede before trying it, desiring, perhaps, to know the actual degree of that jealousy that had made his love miserable.

"Come!" he said, and they showed themselves in a rosy sunset glow, lighting up the bald pates, the grayish beards of Déchelette's friends, thrown on the low divans, around an Oriental table on which trembled, in five or six glasses, the aniseed and milky liqueur that Alice was in the act of pouring out. The women embraced each other: "You know these gentlemen, Gaussin?" Déchelette asked, while rocking in his armchair.

Did he know them! —— Two at least were familiar to him through having stared for hours at

their portraits among celebrities in show-windows. How they had made him suffer, what hate he had felt against them, a continuous hatred, a wild desire to jump on them, to gnaw their faces, when he met them in the street! — But Fanny had well said that he would get over that; now, they were to him the faces of his acquaintances, almost relatives, remote uncles whom he found again.

“Always handsome, the little fellow! —” said Caoudal, stretched out at his full, giant length and holding a hand-screen over his eyes to protect them from the light. “And Fanny, let us see! —” He raised himself on his elbow, winked his expert eyes: “Your countenance still holds out; but as for your figure, you do well to lace it — At least, console yourself, my girl, La Gournerie is still stouter than you.”

The poet disdainfully puckered his thin lips. Seated Turk-like on a pile of cushions,—since his trip to Algeria he pretended not to be able to sit otherwise,—enormous, greasy, no longer having any mark of intellect except his solid brow under a white forest, and his harsh, slave-driver’s look,

towards Fanny he affected a conventional reserve, an exaggerated politeness, as if to give Caoudal a lesson.

Two landscape painters, with sunburnt faces and rustic heads, completed the assemblage ; they also knew Jean's mistress, and the younger said to him, while shaking his hand :

"Déchelette has told us the child's story, what you have done in that respect is very considerate, my dear."

"Yes," Caoudal remarked to Gaussin, "yes, very 'chic,' adoption is —— Not at all provincial."

She seemed embarrassed at these praises, when some one stumbled against a piece of furniture in the dark studio, and a voice asked: "Is any one there?"

Déchelette said :

"It is Ezano."

Jean had never seen him ; but he knew the place that Bohemian, that freakish fellow, now settled, married, the head of a division in the Beaux Arts, had held in Fanny Legrand's life, and he remembered a package of passionate and charming letters.

A small man with hollow features advanced ; he was dried up, had a stiff gait, and gave his hand from afar, kept people at a distance by a platform habit, an administrative affectation. He seemed very much surprised at seeing Fanny, especially at seeing her beautiful after so many years :

“ Bless me ! — Sapho —,” and a furtive blush brightened his cheeks :

That name of Sapho which gave her back to the past, brought her close to all her former friends and caused a certain embarrassment.

“ And Monsieur d’Armandy who has brought her —,” remarked Déchelette quickly, so as to forewarn the newcomer. Ezano saluted ; they commenced to chat. Fanny, reassured on seeing how her lover took matters, and proud of him, of his beauty, of his youth, in the presence of artists and connoisseurs, appeared to be very agreeable and spirited. Entirely absorbed in her present passion, she hardly remembered her intrigues with those men ; years of cohabitation, however, of a life in common on which the imprint of habits is set, of manias contracted by contact and

Chapter XX

"Oh! as for us, we are not housekeeping — Is it not true, Alice?"

"Certainly," the young woman answered in a gentle and absent voice, as, mounted on a chair, she was in the act of gathering wistaria and foliage for a table bouquet.







surviving it, even to that manner of rolling cigarettes which she had acquired from Ezano, as well as her preference for "Job" paper and for "Maryland."

Without the least trouble Jean made note of that little detail which of old would have exasperated him, experiencing, on finding himself so calm, the joy of a prisoner who has filed his chain and feels that the slightest effort will suffice for his escape.

"Eh! my poor Fanny," said Caoudal in a tone of banter while pointing out the others to her, "what a falling away — are they old, are they played out! — there are only two of us, you see, who hold our own."

Fanny began to laugh: "Ah! pardon, colonel," — they sometimes thus called him because of his mustache, — "it is not exactly the same thing —, I am of another promotion —"

"Caoudal always forgets that he is an ancestor," said La Gournerie; and at a movement on the part of the sculptor, whom he knew how to touch to the quick: "Medallist of 1840," he exclaimed in his strident voice, "it is a date, my good fellow! —"

Between these two old friends there remained an aggressive tone, a mute antipathy that had never separated them, but broke out in their looks, their slightest words, and that had existed for twenty years, from the day on which the poet carried off his mistress from the sculptor. Fanny was no longer in their reckoning, both had run the course of other pleasures, other mortifications; but the rancor remained, more deeply sunk with the years.

“Look, then, at both of us, and say frankly if it is I who am the ancestor! ——” Pressed in his waistcoat which made his muscles stand out, Caoudal planted himself erect, his chest rounded, shaking his fiery, coarse hair, in which not a white hair could be seen :

“Medallist of 1840 ——, fifty-eight years old in three months —— And then, what does it prove? —— Is it age that makes men old? —— It is only at the Comédie-Française and at the Conservatoire that men jabber at sixty, while shaking their heads, and limp, with their backs bent, their limbs weak, with senile symptoms. At sixty, zounds! one walks more erect than at thirty,

because one is careful; and woman still snaps you up, provided the heart remains young, and warms, and pervades the whole carcass."

"Do you think so?" remarked La Gournerie, who, chuckling, was looking at Fanny. And Déchelette said with his kindly smile:

"Nevertheless, you are forever repeating that there is nothing like youth ——"

"It is my little Cousinard who has made me change my mind —— Cousinard, my new model —— Eighteen, well rounded, dimples everywhere—a Clodion. And such a good child, of the common people, of the Paris of the Halle, where her mother sells poultry —— She says such stupid things that you cannot but embrace her for them —— The other day, in the studio, she found one of Dejoie's romances, looked at the title: *Thérèse*, and threw it aside with a pretty pout: 'If it were called *Poor Thérèse*, I would have read it all night! ——' I am crazy over her, I tell you."

"At a bound, there you are at housekeeping! —— And in six months there will be

another rupture, tears as big as one's fist, dislike for work, bloodthirsty wrath ——"

Caoudal's brow became clouded :

"It is true that nothing lasts —— One is smitten, one gives up ——"

"Then why be caught?"

"Well, and you? —— Do you think, then, that you are in it for life with the Flemish girl? ——"

"Oh! as for us, we are not housekeeping —— Is it not true, Alice?"

"Certainly," the young woman answered in a gentle and absent voice, as, mounted on a chair, she was in the act of gathering wistaria and foliage for a table bouquet. Déchelette continued :

"There will be no rupture between us, scarcely a separating —— We have made an agreement to spend two months together; on the last day we will separate without despair and without surprise —— I, in fact, shall return to Ispahan,—I have just secured my sleeping-berth,—and Alice will return to her little tenement in the Rue La Bruyère which she still retains."

"On the fourth floor over the entresol, all that is handiest for throwing one's self out of the window!"

While saying that, the young woman smiled, looking ruddy and luminous in the declining daylight, her heavy bunch of mauve flowers in her hand; but the intonation of her words was so deep, so serious, that no one answered. The wind was growing fresher, the houses opposite seemed higher.

"Let us sit down to table," exclaimed the colonel — "And let us talk joyously —"

"Yes, it is that, *gaudeamus igitur* —, let us amuse ourselves whilst we are young, isn't that so, Caoudal? —" said La Gournerie with a false-sounding laugh.

Jean, some days later, was passing again through the Rue de Rome, he found the studio closed, the large tick curtain drawn down over the glass, a gloomy silence from the cellar even to the terraced roof. Déchelette had left at the appointed hour, the agreement having terminated. And he

thought: "It is a fine thing to do as one likes in life, to govern one's reason and one's heart —— Shall I ever have that courage? ——"

A hand was laid on his shoulder:

"Good-day, Gaussin! ——"

Déchelette, with a tired air, and yellower and more frowning than ordinarily, explained to him that he was not yet leaving, being kept in Paris by some business matters, and that he was living at the Grand-Hôtel, the studio filling him with horror since that terrible history ——

"What, then?"

"True, you do not know ——, Alice is dead —— She killed herself —— Wait for me, while I see if there are any letters for me ——"

He returned almost immediately, and while making newspaper wrappers fly with a nervous finger, he was speaking with a hollow voice to himself, like a somnambulist, without looking at Gaussin, who was walking beside him:

"Yes, killed, thrown out of the window, as she had said on the evening you were there —— How could it be helped? —— As for me, I did not

know, I could not suspect — The day on which I was to leave, she said to me in a quiet tone: ‘Take me away, Déchelette, do not leave me alone —, I shall no longer be able to live without you —’ It made me laugh. Imagine me with a woman, away there, among those Kurds — The desert, fevers, bivouacking at night — At dinner she repeated to me again: ‘I will not inconvenience you, you will see how pleasant I shall be —’ Then, seeing that she was causing me grief, she insisted no further — Afterward, we went to the Variétés in a box — all that was agreed upon beforehand — She seemed satisfied, held my hand all the time and murmured: ‘I am all right —’ As I was going out at night, I took her back to her rooms in a carriage; but we were both sad, and did not speak. She did not even thank me for a little package that I slipped into her pocket, the where-with on which to live quietly for a year or two. Having reached Rue La Bruyère, she asked me to go up-stairs — I refused. ‘I entreat you —, as far as the door only.’ But there I held out, I

did not go in. My place was secured, my bag ready, then I had said too much about my going away — While going down-stairs, my heart somewhat swollen, I heard her calling to me something like ‘ — quicker than you —,’ but I understood it only when below, in the street — Oh! —”

He stopped, staring on the ground, in the presence of the horrible vision that the sidewalk now presented to him at every step, that inert and dark mass groaning in the death-struggle —

“She died two hours later, without a word, without a murmur, her golden eyes gazing at me. Was she suffering? did she recognize me? We had laid her on her bed, fully dressed, a large lace mantle enveloping one side of her head to conceal the wound on her skull. Very pale, with a little blood on the temple, she was still pretty, so sweet — But as I stooped to wipe away that drop of blood which was ever returning, inexhaustible, — her look seemed to me to assume an indignant and terrible expression — A mute malediction the poor girl was hurling at me — And, moreover, what would it have mattered to remain a little time

longer or to take her away with me, she who was ready for anything, giving so little trouble? — No, pride, obstinacy in keeping my word — Well, I did not yield, and she is dead, dead through me who loved her nevertheless —”

He became excited, spoke out loud, followed by the looks of the astonished people whom he was elbowing on his way down the Rue d'Amsterdam; and Gaussin, passing in front of his former home, whose balcony and veranda he noticed, went back to Fanny and their own history, and felt himself seized with a shiver whilst Déchelette continued:

“I took her to Montparnasse, without friends, without family — I desired to be the only one concerned about her — And since, I am there, ever thinking of the same thing, unable to decide about leaving with that besetting idea, and shunning my house in which I spent two months so happily by her side — I live outside, I run around, I try to distract myself, to escape that dead woman's eye which accuses me under the trickling blood —”

And stopping, assailed by that remorse, with two great tears stealing down his little, flat, good-natured nose, so taken up with life, he said:

“Come, my friend; I am not wicked, nevertheless — it is very strange that I should have done that —”

Jean tried to console him, blaming everything on chance, on evil destiny; but Déchelette repeated as he shook his head, his teeth clenched:

“No, no — I shall never forgive myself — I would like to punish myself —”

That desire for an expiation did not cease to haunt him, he spoke of it to all his friends, to Gaussin whom he had just met on leaving the office.

“Go away, then, Déchelette — Travel, work, it will distract you —,” Caoudal and others repeated to him, somewhat uneasy at his fixed idea, at that eagerness to make them repeat that he was not wicked. At last, one evening, whether it was that he wanted to see the studio again before going away, or that a well-determined plan of putting an end to his trouble had brought him

to it, he returned to his home, and in the morning some laborers going down from the faubourgs to their work picked him up on the sidewalk in front of his door, his skull split open, dead from the same mode of suicide as the woman, with the same horrors, the same shattering of a despair cast into the street.

In the half-lighted studio, a multitude crowded, artists, models, actresses, all the dancers, all the supper-takers at the last fêtes. It was a shuffling, whispering noise, the murmur of a chapel beneath the small flame of the tapers. People were looking through the bindweed and the foliage at the body laid out in a silk stuff ornamented with golden flowers, the head being turbaned in order to conceal the hideous wound, stretched out at full length,—the white hands in front bespeaking resignation, the supreme dissolution,—on the low divan shaded with wistarias on which Gaussin and his mistress had become acquainted on the night of the ball.



X

People sometimes die, then, through these ruptures!—— Now, when they were disputing, Jean no longer dared to speak of his departure, he no longer exclaimed in exasperation: “Happily, it is going to end.” She would have only to answer: “It is well, go ——, as for me, I will kill myself, I will do like the other ——” And this threat which he thought he understood in the melancholy of her looks and of the airs that she sang, and in the dreaminess of her fits of silence, disturbed him even to terrifying him.

Yet he had passed the final examination for classification of consular subordinates, the ministerial stage; receiving a high average, they were about to appoint him to one of the first vacant positions, it would be only a matter of weeks, of days! —— And around them, in that closing

season with its sunlight lessening day by day, everything was hastening also towards the winter changes. One morning, Fanny, opening the window to the first fog, exclaimed :

“Look, the swallows have left ——”

One after another, the middle-class houses in the country had their shutters closed ; on the Versailles road, furniture-moving cars were succeeding one another, large country omnibuses loaded with packages, with plumes of green plants on the platform, whilst the leaves were whirling in eddies, rolling like the flying clouds under the low sky, and grain-mows rose in the bare fields. Behind the orchard, stripped of its leaves, shrunken from want of verdure, the closed cottages, the laundry drying-rooms with their red roofs were massed on a gloomy landscape, and on the other side of the house, the railroad, open to view, disclosed its dark rails in bas-relief along the gray woods.

What cruelty to leave her there alone amid those sad surroundings ! He felt his heart fail in advance ; never would he have the courage to bid her adieu. Indeed it was on this that she

counted, and was awaiting at that supreme moment, hitherto peaceful, speaking of nothing, faithful to her promise to put no obstacles in the way of that departure, foreseen and agreed to from the beginning. One day, he returned with this news :

“ I am appointed —— ”

“ Ah ! —— and where, then ? —— ”

She questioned, with an air of indifference, but with colorless lips and eyes, with such a contraction of her whole countenance that he did not allow her to wait any longer : “ No, no ——, not yet —— I have given up my turn to Hédouin ——, it will give us at least six months —— ”

There was an overflowing of tears, of laughter, of frantic kisses as he stammered : “ Thanks, thanks —— What a happy life I am now going to make you lead ! —— It was that, you see, that made me wicked, it was that idea of separation —— ” She was going to prepare herself better for it, to resign herself to it little by little. And then, in six months, it would no longer be autumn, with the reaction of those tales of death.

She kept her word. No more nervousness, no more quarrels; and even, to avoid the annoyance caused by the child, she decided to place him in a boarding school at Versailles. He went out only on Sunday, and if this new régime did not as yet modify his rebellious and wild nature, at least it taught him hypocrisy. They lived calmly, dinners with the Hettémas enjoyed without a storm, and the piano opened again for the favorite part songs. But, in reality, Jean grew more uneasy, more perplexed than ever, asking himself whither his weakness would lead him, sometimes thinking of giving up the consulates, of passing into the administrative service. It was Paris, the agreement as to housekeeping indefinitely renewed; but what of the whole dream of his youth destroyed, and his own folks' despair, the inevitable quarrel with his father who would not forgive him for that abandonment, especially when he knew its causes!

And for whom? — For an aging, faded creature, whom he no longer loved, he had had the proof of that in the presence of her lovers —

What hellish art, then, was mixed up with that joint life?

As he was getting into a railroad coach one morning, in the closing days of October, a young girl's look raised toward his suddenly reminded him of his meeting in the woods, that radiant grace of a child-woman, the memory of which had haunted him for months. She wore the same white dress that he had seen under the branches and flecked so prettily by the sun, but now covered over with a long traveling cloak; and in the coach, books, a small bag, a bouquet of long reeds and some late flowers, bespoke the return to Paris, the close of the season in the country. She, too, had recognized him, with a half smile trembling in her eyes which were as limpid as spring-water; and there was, for a moment, an understanding on the part of these two beings, of the same unexpressed thought.

"How is your mother, Monsieur d'Armandy?" suddenly asked old Bouchereau, whom Jean, dazzled, had not seen at first, buried as he was in his corner and reading, his pale face stooping.

Jean gave them the latest news, very much touched at his folks and himself being remembered, still much more moved when the young lady inquired about the little twin girls who had written to her uncle so pretty a letter thanking him for the attention paid to their mother — She knew them! — that filled him with joy; then, as he was, it appears, extremely sensitive that morning, he immediately became sad, on learning that they were returning to Paris, that Bouchereau was going to take up his six months' course at the *École de Médecine*. He would no longer have the chance of seeing her again — And the fields filing past the coach doors, splendid a moment ago, seemed to him cheerless, as if the light that brightened them had been eclipsed.

The train gave a long whistle; they arrived. He bade adieu, lost them, but on going out of the station they met again, and Bouchereau, in the tumult of the crowding, told him that on and after the following Thursday he would be at home, in the *Place Vendôme* —, if he felt inclined for a cup of tea — She gave her arm

to her uncle, and it seemed to Jean that it was she who was inviting him, without saying anything.

After having decided several times that he would go to Bouchereau's, then that he would not go—for what was the good of giving himself useless regrets?—he gave notice nevertheless at his own house that there would soon be a grand evening-party at the ministry which he would have to attend. Fanny examined his dress-suit, had his white cravats ironed; and suddenly, on the Thursday evening, he no longer had the least desire to go out. But his mistress reasoned with him on the necessity of that extra duty, reproaching herself with having absorbed him too much, selfishly kept him to herself, and she prevailed upon him, mirthfully, affectionately, finished his toilet, retouched the knot of his cravat, the parting of his hair, laughed because her fingers smelled of the cigarette, which she took up again and laid down on the mantelpiece every minute, and because it would cause his partners to make wry faces. And on seeing her very cheerful and agreeable, he felt remorse for his lying, and would willingly have

remained with her in the chimney corner, if Fanny had not compelled him: "I wish it —, it must be done," and tenderly she pushed him out into the dark road.

It was late when he returned; she was asleep, and the lamp lighting that sleep of exhaustion reminded him of a similar return, already three years ago, after the terrible revelations that had been made to him. How cowardly he had then shown himself! By what aberration had that which ought to have broken his chain, riveted it more solidly? — A nausea arose to his lips, a disgust. The room, the bed, the woman horrified him equally; he took the light, carried it into the side room, gently. He was so anxious to be alone in order to think of what was happening to him —; oh! nothing, almost nothing —

He loved.

There is, in certain words that we ordinarily use, a hidden spring that suddenly discloses their

depths, explains to us their exceptional minuteness: then the word closes again, resumes its commonplace form and continues insignificant, without force from habitual mechanical use. Love is one of those words: those for whom its clearness is translated in its entirety will understand the delightful anguish in which Jean lived for the last hour, without clearly accounting to himself, at first, for that which he was experiencing.

Down there, in the Place Vendôme, in that corner of a parlor in which they remained a long time chatting together, he felt nothing but a great happiness, a sweet charm that was enveloping him.

It was only when outside, the door having closed behind him, that he had been seized with a wild buoyancy, then with a weakness, making him believe that all his veins were opening: "My God! what is the matter with me? ——" And the Paris through which he was passing in order to return, appeared to him entirely new, fairy-like, broadened, radiant.

Yes, at that hour when nocturnal beasts are let loose and are roaming around, when the filth of the sewers rises, spreads itself, swarms under the

yellow gas, he, Sapho's lover, prying into debauchery of all sorts, saw the Paris that may be seen by the young girl returning from the ball with waltz airs filling her head which she repeats to the stars in all the whiteness of her attire, that chaste Paris[?] bathed in bright moonlight in which virgin souls bloom, it was that Paris that he saw! And suddenly, as he was going up the broad stairway of the railroad station, so near the return to the evil lair, he found himself saying aloud: "But I love her —, I love her —," and it was thus that he had learned it.

"You are there, Jean? — What are you doing, then?"

Fanny wakes with a start, frightened at not feeling him beside her. He must go and embrace her, lie, tell of the ministry ball, say whether there were pretty toilets and with whom he danced; but to escape this inquisition, and especially the caresses that he dreaded, thoroughly impregnated as he was with the recollections of the other, he invented a hurried work, the Hettéma drawings.

"There is no more fire, you will be cold."

"No, no ——"

"At least, leave the door open, so that I can see your lamp ——"

It was necessary to act his lie to the end, to install the table, the plans; then seated, motionless, holding his breath, he reviews, and, to fix his dream, relates it to Césaire in a long letter, whilst the night wind stirs the branches, which crackle without a quivering leaf, whilst trains succeed one another with heavy rumble, and La Balue, disturbed by the light, stirs about in its little cage, jumps from one perch to another uttering uncertain cries.

He tells everything, the meeting in the woods, the railroad coach, his strange emotion on entering those parlors that had seemed to him so dismal and tragic on the day of the consultation, of the furtive whisperings in the doorways, of sad looks exchanged from chair to chair, and which, that evening, opened animated and noisy, in a long luminous suite. Bouchereau himself no longer had

his severe expression, that dark eye, searching and disconcerting under those heavy eyebrows like tow, but the restful and paternal expression of a good-natured man who consents to be amused at home.

“Suddenly she came toward me and I saw nothing more — My friend, her name is Irène, she is pretty, she has a kind expression, hair of that gold-brown of Englishwomen, and a childish mouth ever ready to laugh — Oh! not that mirthless laugh that irritates in so many women; a true outpouring of youth and happiness — She was born in London; but her father is a Frenchman and she has no accent at all, only an adorable way of pronouncing certain words, of saying ‘uncle’ which every time makes old Bouchereau’s eyes suggest a caress. He took her to himself in order to comfort his brother’s family, which is numerous, and to replace Irène’s sister, the eldest, married two years ago to his clinic chief. But as for her, you see, physicians hardly take with her — How she amused me with the stupidity of that young scholar requiring of his betrothed, above all things, a formal and

solemn pledge to bequeath both their bodies to the Anthropological Society! — She is a migratory bird. She loves boats, the sea ; the sight of a bowsprit turned to the sea captivates her heart — She told me all that freely, as a comrade, quite an English miss in her manners, in spite of her Parisian graces, and I listened to her, delighted with her voice, with her laughter, with the agreement of our tastes, with an inner certainty that the happiness of my life was there, at my hand, and that I had only to take hold of it, to carry it far off, very far off, whither the adventurous career might send me —”

“Come to bed, then, my love —”

He starts, stops, instinctively conceals the letter that he is in the act of writing : “Immediately — Go to sleep, go to sleep —”

He speaks to her angrily and, his back stretched, hears the return of sleep in that woman's regular breathing, for they are very near each other, and yet so far!

“—— Whatever happens, this meeting and this love will be the deliverance. You know my life; you understood, without our ever speaking of it, that she is the same as formerly, that. I have not been able to free myself. But what you do not know is that I was ready to sacrifice fortune, future, everything, to that fatal habit to which I became bound closer every day. Now, I have found the spring, the mainstay that I lacked; and so as no longer to leave a way open to my weakness, I have sworn to return down there only free and separated —— To-morrow, escape ——”

It was neither to-morrow nor the day after. A means was necessary for escaping, a pretext, the outcome of a quarrel in which one exclaims: “I am going away,” never again to return; and Fanny showed herself gentle and pleasant as in the first illusionary times of housekeeping.

To write “It is ended” without further explanations? —— But this violent one would not be thus resigned, would renew her efforts, would pursue him even to the very door of his house,

of his office. No, it would be better to attack her direct, to convince her of the irrevocable, of the finality of that rupture, and, without wrath as without pity, enumerate its causes to her.

But with these reflections, a dread returned to him of Alice Doré's suicide. There was in front of their house, on the other side of the pavement, a sloping lane leading to the railroad and shut off by a gate; the neighbors took that way, when they were in a hurry, to follow the rails as far as the station. And the Southerner's imagination foresaw, after their separation scene, his mistress hastening along the road, reaching the crossing, throwing herself under the wheels of the train that bore him away. This fear so haunted him that the mere thought of that swinging barrier, between two walls covered with ivy, made him put off the explanation.

Again, if he had had a friend there, some one to shield her, to assist her in that first crisis; but, buried in their concubinage like marmots, they knew no one, and it was not the Hettémas, those monstrous egotists shining and swimming in fat,

made more bestial by the approach of their hibernation, like that of Esquimaux, that the unfortunate woman would have been able to call to the aid of her despair and of her abandonment.

It was necessary to separate, nevertheless, and that quickly. In spite of his promise to himself, Jean returned twice or thrice to the Place Vendôme, ever more and more smitten; and though he had said nothing yet, old Bouchereau's reception with open arms, Irène's attitude in which, mingled with reserve, there was a tenderness, an indulgence, and, as it were, the anxious awaiting of the declaration, everything warned him against further delay. Then the punishment of lying, the pretexts that he invented for Fanny, and the sort of sacrilege in going from Sapho's kisses to discreet, lisping courtship.

XI

In the midst of these difficulties, he found on his table, at the ministry, the card of a gentleman who had already been there twice in the morning, so said the usher with a certain respect for the following nomenclature :

C. GAUSSIN D'ARMANDY

Président des Submersionnistes de la Vallée du Rhône.
Membre du Comité central d'étude et de vigilance,
Délégué départemental, etc., etc.

Uncle Césaire in Paris! — Le Fénat a delegate, a member of a vigilance committee! — His stupor had not yet left him when his uncle appeared, still brown as a pine-cone, his eyes wild, his laugh extending to the corners of his temples,

his beard of the time of the League, but, instead of the eternal ribbed fustian waistcoat, a new frockcoat buttoned tightly over his stomach and giving a truly presidential majesty to the little man.

What brought him to Paris? The purchase of an elevator for the irrigation of his new vines,—he pronounced the word “elevator” with a conviction that magnified him in his own estimation,—then the ordering of his bust which his colleagues had asked for, to adorn the council chamber.

“You saw,” he added with a modest air, “that they have made me president — My idea of submersion is turning the South upside down — And to say that it is I, Le Fénat, who am in the act of saving the wines of France! — There are only crazy folks, you see.”

But the chief object of his journey was the rupture with Fanny. Learning that the affair was dragging out tediously, he came to make a bold stroke. “I know something about it, you think — When Courbebaisse abandoned his girl to get married —” Before getting to his

story proper, he stopped, and unbuttoning his frockcoat, took out of it a small pocketbook, fairly bulging :

“ In the first place, relieve me of this —— Yes, indeed ! money ——, the liberation of the territory —— ” He mistook his nephew’s gesture, and understood that he was refusing from discretion : “ Take it, then, take it, then ! —— It is my pride to be able to pay back to the son a little of what the father did for me —— Moreover, Divonne will have it so. She is informed of the affair, and so happy that you are thinking of getting married, of shaking off your old shackles ! ”

In Césaire’s mouth, after the service that his mistress had done him, Jean thought the expression “ old shackles ” somewhat unjust, and it was with a touch of bitterness that he answered :

“ Keep your pocketbook, uncle ——, you know better than any one how indifferent to Fanny such matters are.”

“ Yes, she was a good girl ——,” said the uncle, in the form of a funeral oration, and he added, twinkling his crow’s-foot eye :

"Keep the money, however —— With the temptations of Paris, I would rather it be in your hands than in mine; besides, it is necessary for ruptures as well as for duels ——"

Thereupon he arose, declaring that he was dying of hunger and that this big question could be discussed better, with fork in hand, while breakfasting. Ever the same joking levity of the Southerner in discussing the affairs of a woman.

"Between ourselves, little fellow ——" They were at table in a restaurant in the Rue de Bourgogne, and the uncle was spreading himself, his napkin under his chin, while Jean was nibbling with his front teeth, his stomach too oppressed to eat —— "I feel that you are taking the matter too tragically. I know well that the first step is hard, the explanation wearisome; but if that costs you too much, say nothing, do like Courbebaïsse. Until the morning of his marriage, La Mornas was ignorant of everything. One evening, on leaving his future bride's, he went to look for the singer at her music-hall, and

escorted her back home. You will tell me that that is not very regular or very honorable either. But when one does not like scenes, and with terrible women like Paola Mornas! — For nearly ten years that tall, handsome youth trembled in the presence of that little blackamoor. To get rid of her, he had to have recourse to trickery, to manœuvre —” And this is how he went about it.

On the eve of the wedding day, a fifteenth of August, the feast of the Assumption, Césaire proposed to the little woman to go and fish for a fry in the Yvette. Courbebaisse was to join them at dinner; and all three would return next evening, when Paris had exhaled its odor of dust, of rocket shells and of lamp oil. That suits. There they are, both of them stretched out on the grass on the bank of that little river which dances and shines between its low banks, makes the meadows so green and the willows so rich in leaves. After the fishing, the bathing. It was not the first time that it happened that they had swum together, Paola and he, as good chums, as comrades; but

on that day, this little Mornas, her arms and legs bare, her Maugreb body as if made in a mould, with her costume clinging to it everywhere through the moisture —, perhaps also the idea that Courbebaisse had given him full liberty — Ah! the wench — She turned around, looked him straight in the eyes, and said, severely:

“You know, Césaire, do not try it again.”

He did not insist, afraid that he would spoil his affair, and said to himself: “It will do after dinner.”

Very lively was the dinner, on the wooden balcony of the inn, between the two flags that the host had hoisted in honor of the Assumption. It was warm, the smell of the hay was pleasant, and they heard the drums, the rockets, the choral society promenading the streets.

“Isn’t he tiresome, this Courbebaisse, not to come until to-morrow,” said La Mornas, stretching out her arms, her eyes brightened by champagne —, “I would like to enjoy myself this evening.”

“And I, too!”

He had come and was leaning beside her on the balcony railing, which was still burning from the day's sun, and slyly, as if to sound her, he passed his arm around her waist: "Oh! Paola —, Paola —" This time, instead of being angry, the singer began to laugh, but so loudly, and with such a good heart that he ended by doing likewise. A similar attempt, repelled in the same manner, was made in the evening, as they returned from the feast where they had danced, and drawn macaroons; and as their rooms adjoined, she sang to him through the partition: *You're too l'tle, you're too l'tle* —, with all sorts of unfavorable comparisons between him and Courbebaisse. He refrained from answering her, from calling her the widow Mornas; for it was yet too soon. Next day, however, on sitting down in front of a good breakfast, whilst Paola was becoming impatient and uneasy, at last, on not seeing her man arrive, it was with a certain satisfaction that he took out his watch and said solemnly:

"Noon, it is over —"

"What, then?"

"He is married."

"Who?"

"Courbebaisse."

Bang!

"Ah! my friend, what a slap in the face —— In all my adventures in gallantry I have never received anything like it. And, all at once, see her wishing to go —— But there was no train before four o'clock —— And during that time the faithless one was scorching the rails of the Paris, Lyons and Mediterranean Company toward Italy, with his wife. Then, in her rage, she bites again, disfigures me with blows and scratches ;—that chance! —— it was I who had locked us in ;—then she goes for the dishes and plates, and at last falls in a terrible crisis of nervousness. At five, she is carried to her bed, she is held up, whilst I, quite scratched as if I had come out of a bramble thicket, run to find the Orsay doctor —— In those affairs it is as in dueling, always necessary to have a doctor with you. Think of me, on the roads, fasting, and in such a sun! —— It was night when I brought him back —— Suddenly,

on approaching the inn, there was the murmur of a crowd, a gathering under the windows — Ah! my God, she had committed suicide? She had killed somebody? With La Mornas it was more likely — I hurry, and what do I see? — The balcony loaded with Venetian lanterns and the singer standing, consoled and superb, wrapped in one of the flags and howling the *Marseillaise*, in the midst of an imperial feast, over the heads of the applauding people.

“And that, my little fellow, is how Courbe-baisse’s intrigue ended; I will not tell you that it was all over at once. After ten years in irons, it is always necessary to count on a little oversight. But indeed the worst of it fell on me; and I will take quite as much of yours, if you wish.”

“Ah! uncle, she is not the same kind of woman.”

“Nonsense!” said Césaire, as he broke open a box of cigars to which he put his ear to make sure that they were dry, “you are not the first to leave her —”

“That is true, nevertheless —”

And Jean regained happiness at these words which would have wrung his heart some months before. In reality, his uncle and his comic story reassured him to some extent, but what he did not admit was the double lie of months, that hypocrisy, that sharing ; he could never decide upon it, and had delayed only too long.

“ Then how do you mean to act ? —— ”

Whilst the young man was debating midst these uncertainties, the member of the Vigilance Committee was stroking his beard, was trying smiles, effects, poses of his head ; then he said in a careless way :

“ Is it far from here that he lives ? ”

“ Who, then ? ”

“ Why, that artist, that Caoudal of whom you spoke to me about my bust —— We might go and see his prices, whilst we are together —— ”

Caoudal, though famous, a great spendthrift, still occupied in the Rue d'Assas the studio where he had achieved his early successes. Césaire, while going, inquired about his artistic standing ; he set the price upon it, certainly, but those gentlemen

of the committee were bent upon having a work of the first order.

"Oh! do not be in the least afraid, uncle, if Caoudal wants indeed to take charge of it ——" And he enumerated to him the sculptor's titles, Member of the Institute, Commander of the Legion of Honor and of a multitude of foreign orders. Le Fénat opened his eyes wide.

"And you are friends?"

"Very friendly."

"This is Paris, nothing less! —— what fine acquaintances one makes here."

Gaussin would be somewhat ashamed, nevertheless, to acknowledge that Caoudal was a former lover of Fanny, and that she had brought them together. But it might be seen that Césaire was thinking of it:

"It is he who is the author of that Sapho which we have at Castelet? —— Then he knows your mistress, and could perhaps be of service to you in breaking with her. The Institute, the Legion of Honor, that always makes an impression on a woman ——"

Jean did not answer, thinking also perhaps of making use of the first lover's influence.

And his uncle continued with a hearty laugh :

"By the way, you know, the bronze is no longer at your father's — When Divonne knew, when I had the misfortune to tell her that it represented your mistress, she would no longer have it there — With the consul's crotchets, his opposition to the slightest change, it was not easy, especially without letting him suspect the reason — Oh! the women — She managed so well that, at this hour, Monsieur Thiers presides on your father's mantelpiece, and poor Sapho is crumbling to dust in the storm room, with the old andirons and the disused furniture; left just as she was after the jolting in transport, her chignon broken and her lyre no longer serviceable. Divonne's rancor, no doubt, must have brought her misfortune."

They reached the Rue d'Assas. In the presence of the modest and workmanlike appearance of that city of artists, those studios with their numbered doors like those of coach houses, opening on

each side of a long court at the end of which are the commonplace buildings of a communal school with the perpetual intonations of the reading, the president of the submersionists had fresh doubts about the talent of a man located in such modest quarters; but as soon as he entered Caoudal's, he knew what he had to expect:

“Not for a hundred thousand francs, not for a million!——” howled the sculptor, at Gaussin's first words; and gradually raising his huge body from the divan on which he was stretched, in the disorder and negligence of the studio: “A bust!—— Ah! well, yes——, but look down there, then, at that crushing of plaster into a thousand fragments——, my figure for the coming Salon which I have just demolished with mallet blows—— That is the account I take of sculpture, and no matter how tempting be the phiz of Mosieur——”

“Gaussin d'Armandy——, president——”

The uncle was collecting all his titles, but there were too many of them, and Caoudal interrupted him, turning towards the young man:

"You are looking at me, Gaussin — You find me aging? —"

It is true that he clearly showed his age in that daylight falling from above on those scars, the hollows and bruises of his jaded and dissipated face, his lion's mane showing patches like thread-bare spots on an old carpet, his hanging, flabby jowls, and his mustache, which he no longer took the trouble to curl or to dye, having the tints of metal with the gilding rubbed off — What was the use? — Cousinard, the little model, had just left. "Yes, my dear fellow, with my moulder, a savage, a brute, but twenty years old! —"

With a wild and ironical intonation, he was pacing the studio, kicking over with his boot the footstool that was blocking his way. Suddenly, stopping in front of the mirror wreathed in garlands of copper, placed over the divan, he looked at himself with a frightful grimace: "Am I ugly enough, sufficiently broken down, look at the cords, an old cow's dewlaps! —" He took his neck in his hand, then in a lamenting and comical accent, the foresight of an old mournful

dandy: "And to say that I will regret it, next year! ——"

The uncle remained horrified. That academician letting loose his tongue against himself, relating his base loves! There were fools, then, everywhere, even in the Institute; and his admiration for the great man was diminished by reason of the sympathy that he felt for his weaknesses.

"How is Fanny? —— Are you still at Chaville? ——" remarked Caoudal, suddenly appeased and coming to sit down beside Gaussin, whose shoulder he tapped familiarly.

"Ah! poor Fanny, we have not much longer to live together ——"

"You are going away?"

"Yes, soon ——, and I am going to get married first —— I must leave her."

The sculptor smiled savagely:

"Bravo! I am satisfied —— Be avenged for us, my little fellow, be avenged for us on those hussies. Forsake them, deceive them, and let them weep, the wretches! You will never do them as much harm as they have done to others."

Uncle Césaire was triumphant:

"You see, the gentleman does not take things as tragically as you — Do you understand this innocent —, what keeps him from going away is the fear that she will kill herself!"

Jean quite artlessly acknowledged the impression that Alice Doré's suicide had made on him.

"But it is not the same thing," said Caoudal, briskly — "She was a morbid girl, a weak creature without any grit —, a doll without bran — Déchelette was wrong in believing that she died for him — A suicide from fatigue and weariness of life. Whilst Sapho —, ah! to be sure, kill herself — She likes love rather too much and will burn until the end, to the very socket. She is of the race of the young leading actors who never change their parts, and end without teeth, without eyebrows, in the dress of their rôle — Look at me, then — Am I killing myself? — It is useless for me to be grieved, I know well that she, having left me, I shall take another, that one will always be necessary to me — Your mistress will do like me,

as she has already done — Only she is no longer young, and it will be more difficult."

The uncle continued triumphant: "There you are reassured, eh?"

Jean said nothing, but his scruples were overcome and his resolve well taken. They were leaving, when the sculptor called them back to show them a photograph picked up from the dust on his table and which he wiped with the back of his sleeve. "See, there she is! — Isn't she pretty, the jade —, to fall on one's knees before — Those legs, that throat!" And the contrast was terrible between those ardent eyes, that passionate mouth, and the senile trembling of his big spade-like fingers in which shook the smiling picture of Cousinard, the soft-dimpled little model.



XII

"It is you! — how early you have come! —"

She was coming from the lower end of the garden, her dress full of fallen apples, and was ascending the steps very quickly, a little uneasy at her lover's countenance, which was at the same time embarrassed and determined.

"What is the matter, then?"

"Nothing, nothing —, it is the weather, the sun — I wanted to take advantage of the last fine day to have a look around the forest together — Will you go?"

She uttered the street Arab's cry, her customary expression whenever she was pleased:

"Oh! what luck —" For more than a month they had not gone out, penned in by the rains and the squalls of November. They could not always be enjoying themselves in the country; they might

as well live in the Ark with Noah's animals — She had some directions to give about the kitchen, because the Hettémas were coming to dinner ; and while he was waiting outside for her, on the Pavé des Gardes, Jean was looking at the little house warmed by that soft, Indian summer light, the country street with broad, moss-grown flags, with those parting glances, concentrated and reminiscent, that we give to the places that we are going to leave.

The song of the oriole was heard through the wide-open dining-room window, alternating with Fanny's orders to the servant-woman : " Especially do not forget, for half-past six — You will serve the guinea-fowl first — Ah ! let me give you some linen for the table — " Her voice rang, clear, happy amid the sputterings of the kitchen and the little cries of the bird chanting its loud song in the sunshine. And as he knew that their housekeeping had only two hours to last, those festal preparations wrung his heart.

He felt inclined to go in again, to tell her all, there, at once ; but he was afraid of her cries,

of the terrible scene that the neighbors would hear, of a scandal that would excite upper and lower Chaville. He knew that, when unchained, she considered nothing, and kept to his idea of taking her into the forest.

“See —, here I am —”

Lightly she took his arm, warning him to speak low and to walk quickly while passing in front of their neighbors' houses, fearing lest Olympe would wish to accompany them and embarrass their pleasant companionship. She was at ease only when they had passed the paved road and the railroad bridge, and had turned to the left into the wood.

It was mild, radiant weather, the sunshine sifted through a silvery and floating mist, which bathed the whole atmosphere, and clung to the thickets, in which some trees still bore their golden leaves and held magpies' nests and bunches of green mistletoe at great heights. They heard a bird's cry, continuous, like the sound of a file, and those peckings on the wood responding to the wood-cutter's chopping.

They were going slowly, marking their footsteps on the ground softened by the autumn rains. She was warm through having come so quickly, her cheeks ruddy, her eyes sparkling; she stopped to raise the long blond-lace mantilla, a present from Rosa, with which she had protected her head when going out, the fragile and costly remains of past splendors. The dress that she wore, a poor black silk garment, broken under the arms and at the waist, he knew her to have had for three years past; and when she raised it, on passing in front of him, because of some puddle, he saw the heels of her shoes turning over.

How pleasantly she had accepted that half-poverty, without regret or complaint, anxious about him, his happiness, never more content than when she was nestled close to him, both her hands crossed on his arm. And Jean asked himself as he looked at her quite rejuvenated from that renewal of sunshine and of love, what pressure of sap was there in such a creature, what a marvelous faculty of forgetfulness and of pardon, in order to keep so much gayety and thoughtlessness, after a life of passions,

of disappointments and of tears, all that marked on her countenance, but disappearing at the slightest impulse of gayety.

"It is an edible mushroom, I tell you that it is an edible mushroom ——"

She went into the copse, sank to her knees in dead leaves, returned with her headdress disarranged and rumpled by the brambles, and showed him that little network on the mushroom stalk which distinguishes the true edible species from the false: "You see, it has the mesh! ——" And she was triumphant.

He was not listening, absent-minded, interrogating himself: "Is this the moment? —— Must it be? ——" But courage failed him, she was laughing too much or the place was not favorable; and he was ever drawing her farther on, like an assassin who is meditating his blow.

He was going to decide, when, at the turning of an alley, some one appeared and disturbed them, the keeper of that district, Hochecorne, whom they sometimes met. He was a poor devil who had lost in succession, in the little forester's house that the

State had allotted to him at the edge of the pond, two children, then his wife, and always by the same pernicious fevers. At the time of the first death, the physician declared the habitation unhealthy, too close to the water and its emanations. And despite certificates and recommendations, they had left him there two years, three years, time to see all his people die, with the exception of a little girl with whom he had just been installed in a new dwelling at the entrance to the wood.

Hochecorne, with an obstinate Breton face, with bright and brave eyes, with a brow receding under his uniform cap, a true type of fidelity, of superstitious obedience to all orders, had the stock of his gun on one shoulder, and on the other the head of his sleeping child whom he was carrying.

"How is she?" Fanny asked, smiling at that four-year-old little girl, made pale and diminutive by fever, as she awoke and opened her large eyes encircled with red. The keeper sighed :

"Not well — It is useless for me to take her everywhere with me —, she no longer eats, she has no taste for anything ; it must be that it was

too late when we moved and when she had already caught the disease —— She is so light, see, madame, one might say she was a leaf —— One of these days she will go the road like the others —— Good God!”

That “good God!” muttered quite low, in his mustache, was his whole revolt against the cruelty of the bureaux and the heapers of waste-paper.

“She is trembling, one would say that she is cold.”

“It is the fever, madame.”

“Wait, we are going to warm her ——” She took the mantilla that was hanging on her arm, and put it around the little one: “Yes, yes, leave it there ——, it will be her bridal veil, later on ——”

The father smiled, a heart-rending smile, and moving the little hand of the child who was going to sleep again, in all that whiteness, wan as a little corpse, he made her express thanks to the lady, then went away with a “good God!” lost in the crackling of the branches under his feet.

Fanny was no longer gay, but pressed against him with all that timid tenderness of a woman

whose emotion, be it sadness or joy, brings her close to him she loves. Jean said to himself: "What a good girl! ——" but without weakening in his resolves, becoming strengthened in them on the contrary, for on the slope of the alley that they were entering, arose Irène's image, the memory of the radiant smile given there and which had captivated him immediately, even before he knew its profound charm, the inner source of intelligent sweetness. He thought that he had waited until the last moment, that to-day was Thursday —— "Come, I must, ——" and spying an open space at some distance, he set it to himself as the final limit.

A clear space in a cutting of the wood, trees lying in the midst of chips, bleeding remains of bark, fagots, and charcoal pits —— A little lower down, one saw the pond from which ascended a white mist, and on the bank the little abandoned house, with its roof falling in, its windows broken and open, the Hochecornes' lazaretto. Beyond, the woods rose toward Vélizy, a large hillside as of ruddy fleeces, of high forest growth, dense and gloomy —— He stopped abruptly :

"Suppose we rest a little while?"

They sat down on a long log that was lying on the ground, an old oak whose former branches might be counted by the hackings of the axe. The place was warm, made pleasant by a pale, luminous reflection, and by the perfume of hidden violets.

"How pleasing it is!——" she said, as she leaned on his shoulder and looked for a spot on his neck to kiss. He withdrew a little and took hold of her hand. Then, in the presence of the suddenly hardened expression of his countenance, she was frightened:

"What, then? What is the matter?"

"Bad news, my poor dear —— Hédouin, you know, he who has gone in my place ——" He was speaking with difficulty, in a hoarse voice whose sound astonished himself, but which became stronger towards the end of the story prepared in advance —— Hédouin fell sick on arriving at his post, and he was designated by the department to go and take his place —— He had found that easier to say, less cruel than the

truth. She listened to him until the end without interrupting him, her face ashy-pale, her eyes fixed: "When do you leave?" she asked, withdrawing her hand.

"This very evening ——, to-night ——" And with an affected and doleful voice he added: "I think of spending twenty-four hours at Castelet, then of embarking from Marseilles."

"Enough, do not lie any more," she exclaimed, in a fierce explosion that brought her to her feet, "do not lie any more, you do not know how! —— The truth is that you are going to get married —— Your family have been working you up to it for some time —— They are so much afraid that I am keeping you, that I am preventing you from going and catching typhus or yellow fever —— In fact, they are satisfied —— The girl is to your taste, it must be supposed —— And when I think of the cravat knots that I tied for you, on Thursdays! —— Was I stupid enough, eh?"

She was laughing with a painful, an atrocious laugh, which twisted her mouth, and showed the gap made on one side by the breaking—no doubt

quite recent, for he had not yet seen it—of one of her beautiful pearly teeth of which she was so proud; and that missing tooth in that frightful, hollowed, worried countenance gave Gaussin a horrible pain.

“Listen to me,” he said, taking hold of her again, and forcibly seating her opposite to him — “Well, yes, I am going to be married — My father is bent on it, you well know; but what can that matter to you since I have to go away? —”

She broke loose, wishing to keep up her wrath:

“And it is to tell me this that you have brought me to walk a league through the woods — You said to yourself: At least people will not hear her, if she cries — No —, you see —, not an outburst, not a tear. In the first place, I have had my fill of you, pretty youth that you are —, you can go, it is not I who will make you return — Fly, then, to the isles with your wife, your little one, as they say at your house — She must be all right, the little one must —, ugly as a gorilla, or else visibly pregnant — For you are as glib as those who have chosen her for you.”

She no longer restrained herself, having launched into an overflowing of insults and infamies, until she was finally able only to stammer such words as "coward —, liar —, coward —," in his face, provokingly, as one shakes one's fist.

It was Jean's turn to listen without saying anything, without any effort to stop her. He preferred to have her thus, insulting, ignoble, old man Legrand's true daughter; the separation would be less cruel — Was she conscious of it? But she became silent suddenly, sinking her head and breast upon her lover's knees, with a great sob that shook her all over, and from which came an interrupted wail: "Forgive, pardon —, I love you, I have only you — My love, my life, do not do that —, do not leave me —, what would you have me become?"

His emotion was mastering him — Oh! that was what he had dreaded — Tears mounted from her to him, and he threw his head back so as to keep them from flowing down his cheeks, trying to appease her by stupid words, and ever that reasonable argument: "But since I must leave —"

She straightened herself with this exclamation that unveiled all her hope:

“Eh! you would not have gone. I would have said: ‘Stay, let yourself love on —— Do you think that it occurs twice to be loved as I love you? —— You have time to get married, you are so young ——, as for me, ere long it will be all over with me —— I shall no longer be able, and then we shall naturally separate.’”

He wished to rise; he had that courage, and to tell her that all she was doing was useless; but clinging to him, dragging herself on her knees in the mud that remained in that hollow in the dell, she forced him to resume his place, and in front of him, between his legs, with the breath of her lips, the voluptuous glance of her eyes, and childish caresses, her hands spread on that countenance which was becoming severe, her fingers in his hair and in his mouth, she tried to stir up the cold embers of their love, spoke in whispers of past delights, the reawakenings without strength, the Sunday afternoons spent in oblivious embrace. All that was nothing compared

with what she would yet give him; she knew other kisses, other intoxications, she would invent some for him ——

And whilst she was whispering those words such as men hear at the doors of paltry lodging-houses, she had great tears trickling over her face which expressed agony and terror, she was debating with herself, and exclaiming in a dreamy voice: "Oh! let it not be ——, say that it is not true that you are leaving me ——" And further sobs, groans, appeals for help, as if she saw a knife in his hand.

The executioner was hardly more valiant than the victim. Her wrath he no more feared than her caresses; but he remained defenceless against that despair, that crying which was filling the wood, died out on the dead and fever-producing water on which a sad red sunlight was falling —— He thought indeed of suffering, but not of this acuteness; and all the dazzling of the new love was necessary to him in order to resist raising her up with both his hands, and saying to her: "I will stay, be silent, I will stay ——"

How long a time did they pass in thus exhausting themselves? — The sun became only a narrowing line in the west; the pond took on a slate-gray tint, and one would have said that its unhealthy vapor was invading the heath and the wood, and the hillsides opposite. In the shadow that was gaining upon them, he saw only that pale countenance raised toward him, that open mouth uttering its untiring wail. Soon afterward, night having come, the cries were appeased. Now, it was a sound of tears as of a ceaseless flood, one of those continuous rains that set in during the great turmoil of the storm, with from time to time an "Oh! —" deep and hollow as if in the presence of something horrible that she was driving away and which was always reappearing.

Then, nothing more. It is over, the beast is dead — A cold north wind arises, stirs the branches, bearing the echo of a distant hour.

"Let us go, come, do not stay there."

He raises her up gently, feels her limp in his hands, obedient as a child and convulsed with heavy sighs. It seems as if she retains some fear,

a respect for the man who has just shown himself so strong. She walks by his side, keeping step with him, but timidly, without giving him her arm; and to see them thus, staggering and gloomy, guided along the alleys by the yellow reflection of the ground, one would say they are a peasant couple returning worn out with long toil in the open air.

At the border of the wood, a glimmer appears, Hochecorne's open door, lighting up the fixed shadow of two men: "Is it you, Gaussin?" asks the voice of Hettéma, who approaches with the keeper. They were beginning to be uneasy at not seeing them return, and at those groans which they heard through the woods. Hochecorne was going to get his gun, and to set out in search of them ——

"Good evening, monsieur, madame —— It is the little one who is pleased with her shawl —— It was necessary for me to put her to bed with ——"

Their last act in common, that charity of a moment ago, their hands for the last time joined around that little dying body.

"Adieu, adieu, Père Hochecorne." And all three of them hasten towards the house, Hettéma still very much puzzled by that clamor which filled the wood. "It rose and fell, one would have said it was a beast whose throat was being cut — But how was it you heard nothing?"

Neither of them answers.

At the corner of the Pavé des Gardes, Jean hesitates.

"Stay for dinner," she said to him quite low, supplicating — "Your train has passed —, you will take the nine o'clock."

He went in with them. What could he fear? One does not begin a scene like that a second time, and indeed the least he could do was to give her this little consolation.

The dining-room was warm, the lamp was shining brightly, and the sound of their steps on the crossing warned the servant, who brought the soup to the table.

"At last, here you are! —" said Olympe, who was already installed, her napkin raised up under her short arms. She uncovered the soup tureen

and stopped all of a sudden with an exclamation :
“ My God, my dear ! —— ”

Ghostly, ten years older, her eyelids swollen and inflamed, mud on her dress, even on her hair, the wild disorder of a draggle-tail after having been chased by the police, that is Fanny. She breathes for a moment, her poor burning eyes wink in the light, and gradually the heat of the little house and that gaily served table, stir up the memory of the good days, a fresh evoking of tears in which these words are distinguishable :

“ He is leaving me ——, he is going to get married —— ”

Hettéma, his wife, and the peasant who is serving them look at one another, and look at Gaussin. “ Come, now, let us dine at least,” said the fat man, who, they perceive, is furious ; and the sound of the voracious spoonfuls is mingled with a trickling of water in the neighboring room, where Fanny is in the act of sponging her face. When she returns quite tinted with powder, in a white woollen dressing-gown, the Hettémas watch her with anguish, awaiting some fresh explosion, and are very much

astonished at seeing her, without a word, throw herself gluttonously on the dishes, like one shipwrecked, to fill up the hollowing of her grief and the gulf of her cries with everything that she finds within reach, bread, cabbage, a wing of a guinea-fowl, apples. She eats, she eats —

They chat at first in a constrained way, then more freely, and as with the Hettémas it is only of rather dull and material things, the way to prepare pancakes with preserves, or whether hair is better than feathers to sleep on, they come, without delay, to the coffee, which the fat couple sweeten with a little slightly flavored caramel, their elbows on the table.

It was a pleasure to see the pleasant, confiding and peaceful look exchanged by those heavy crib and litter companions. They had no desire to leave each other, not they. Jean caught that look, and, in the familiarity of the room full of memories, of habits lurking in every corner, a torpor of fatigue, of digestion, of well-being, came upon him. Fanny, who was watching him, gently approached his chair, glided on his knees, slipped her arm under his.

"Listen," he said, brusquely — "It is nine o'clock —, quick, adieu — I will write to you."

He is on his feet, outside, crosses the street, gropes in the dark to open the gate at the crossing. Two arms entwine his body: "Embrace me at least —"

He feels himself clasped under the open dressing-gown where her body is uncovered, penetrated with that odor, with that warmth of a woman's flesh, overcome by that farewell kiss which leaves in his mouth a taste of fever and of tears; and she said, quite low, feeling him weak: "One night more, only one —"

A signal on the road —, it is the train! —

How had he the strength to break loose, to bound as far as the station, whose signal lamps shone through the leafless branches? He was still astonished at it, panting in a corner of a coach, watching through the door the lighted windows of the little house, a white form against the gate — "Adieu! adieu! —" And that call calmed the silent terror that he had just felt at that curve of the rails, perceiving his mistress in the place indicated in his death dream.

His head outside, he saw their little pavilion, whose glimmer was now only like that of a stray star, vanishing and diminishing and winding up, in the merging, as it were, of the disappearing fields. All of a sudden, he felt extremely joyful and comforted. How one breathed, how beautiful was all that Meudon valley and those dark, high hillsides, unfolding in the distance a triangle sparkling with innumerable lights, falling toward the Seine in regular lines! Irène was waiting for him there, and he was going to her with all the speed of the train, with all his desire as a lover, with all his bounding toward a pure and youthful life ——

Paris! —— He stopped a carriage to take him to the Place Vendôme. But, under the gas, he saw his clothes and his shoes covered with mud, a heavy, thick mud, his whole past holding him heavy and dirty. “Oh! no, not this evening ——” And he returned to his old hotel, in the Rue Jacob, where Le Fénat had kept a room for him near his own.



XIII

Next day, Césaire, who had taken upon himself the delicate charge of going to Chaville to take away his nephew's effects and books, to complete the rupture by the breaking up of housekeeping, returned very late, when Gaussin was beginning to get tired out with all sorts of wild and gloomy suppositions. At last, a luggage hack, as heavy as a hearse, turned the corner of the Rue Jacob, loaded with strapped packages and an enormous trunk that he recognized as his own, and his uncle came in, mysterious and broken-hearted :

“It took me long to gather up everything for one trip and not to be obliged to go back there ——” Then, pointing to the packages that two boys were arranging around the room : “Here are the linen and the clothing; there, your papers and your books —— Your letters

only are wanting; she entreated me to leave them with her a little longer for her to read again, to have something from you —— I thought that it offered no danger —— She is such a good girl ——”

He puffed for a long time, seated on the trunk, sponging his brow with his raw silk handkerchief, as large as a napkin. Jean did not dare to ask for details, or in what condition he had found her; the other did not give any, from fear of saddening him. And they bridged that awkward silence, big with things unexpressed, by remarks on the weather that had abruptly changed since the evening before and had turned cold, on the lamentable appearance of that suburban region of Paris deserted and denuded, with its avenues of workshop chimneys and with those enormous iron cylinders, the storehouses for the market gardeners. Then Gaussin said after a moment:

“She gave you nothing for me, uncle?”

“No——, you may be at ease —— She will not annoy you, she took her part with considerable resolve and dignity ——”

Why did Jean see in these few words a suggestion of blame, a reproach for his strictness?

"It is all the same, tit for tat," continued the uncle, "I rather preferred La Mornas' scratches to this wretched woman's despair."

"She wept a great deal?"

"Ah! my friend — Yes, indeed, and with such heart that I myself sobbed in her presence without the strength to —" He snorted, threw off his emotion with a toss of his head like an old goat: "After all, how could it be helped? it is not your fault —, you could not spend all your life there — Things are very suitably arranged, you leave her money, furniture — And now, to the winds with intrigues! Try to give us your marriage off-hand — They are matters too serious for me, bless me — The consul will have to interfere in them — As for me, I am for left-handed settlements —" And suddenly seized with an attack of melancholy, his brow against a window-pane, looking at the lowering sky and the trickling from the roofs:

•

"It is all the same, the world is becoming sad —, in my time, people separated more cheerfully than that."

Le Fénat having left, followed by his elevator, Jean, deprived of that stirring and babbling good-humor, had a tedious week to spend, a sense of vacancy and of solitude, all the dark strangeness of widowhood. In such circumstances, even without the regret of a passion, one seeks his double, and he is wanting; for two living together, the mutual sharing of table and bed creates a tissue of invisible and subtle bonds, the strength of which is revealed only in sorrow, in an effort to break them. The influence of contact and of habit is so miraculously penetrating that two beings living the same life come to resemble each other.

His five years with Sapho had not been able to harden him yet to that point; but his body, nevertheless, kept the marks of the chain, while enduring the heavy dragging. And just as, on several occasions, his steps would have directed him quite alone to Chaville on leaving his office, it happened to him in the morning to seek at his side on the

pillow the black hair in heavy tresses, broken loose from their comb, where his first kiss rested.

The evenings especially seemed to him interminable, in that hotel room that reminded him of the early times of their intrigue, the presence of another delicate and silent mistress, whose little card perfumed the glass with the perfume of the alcove and with the mystery of her name: Fanny Legrand. Then he would go out to get fatigued, to walk, shake off his thoughts mid the noisy refrains and lights of some minor theatre, until the moment when old Bouchereau gave him the right to spend three evenings a week with his betrothed.

They had at last come to an understanding. Irène loved him, *Uncle* indeed desired it; it would be during the early days of April, at the end of the course. Three winter months to see each other, to study each other, to desire each other, to make the loving and charming paraphrase of the first look that binds souls and of the first avowal that troubles them.

The evening of the betrothal, on returning home without the least desire to sleep, Jean felt prompted

to have his room elaborately well ordered, from that natural instinct of putting our life in keeping with our ideas. He installed his table and his still unpacked books, piled up at the bottom of one of those cases done up in haste, the codes between a pile of handkerchiefs and a garden jacket. From between the leaves of a dictionary of Commercial Law, the most frequently used, there then fell a letter without an envelope, in his mistress's handwriting.

Fanny had confided it to the chance of future labors, distrustful of Césaire's short-lived tenderness, thinking that it would thus more surely get there. He was reluctant at first to open it, but yielded at the first rather sweet, rather reasonable words, the agitation of which was felt only by the trembling of the pen, by the unequal following out of the lines. She asked but one favor, only one, that he would return from time to time. She would say nothing, would make no reproach, either as to the marriage or as to that separation which she knew to be absolute and final. But to see him! —

"Think that it is to me a terrible blow, so unexpected and so sudden —— I am as if after a death or a conflagration, not knowing what to set about. I weep, I wait, I look at the place where I was happy. It is only you who could acclimatize me to this new situation —— It is a charity, come and see me, so that I may not feel so isolated ——, I am afraid of myself ——"

These wails, this entreating appeal ran throughout the letter, repeating each time the same words: "Come, come ——" He could believe himself in the clearing in the midst of the woods with Fanny at his feet, and under the grayish purple evening sky, that poor countenance raised toward him, quite disfigured and swollen with weeping, that open mouth that was filled with the echo of her complaints. This it was that haunted him all night, that disturbed his sleep, and not the joyous intoxication that he had brought away from down there. It was that aging, withered countenance, which he saw again, in spite of all his efforts to put between him and her the countenance with pure outlines, like the pulp of a flowering carnation, which the

avowal of love tinted with little red flames under the eyes.

That letter was dated eight days before; eight days that the unhappy girl was waiting for a word, or a visit, the encouragement to resignation that she sought. But why had she not written again since then? Perhaps she was ill; and former fears returned to him. He thought that Hettéma could give him news, and trusting to the regularity of his habits, went to wait for him in front of the Comité d'Artillerie.

The last stroke of ten o'clock sounded at Saint-Thomas d'Aquin when the big man turned the corner of the little square, his collar turned up, his pipe between his teeth, and holding it with both hands so as to warm his fingers. Jean was looking at him coming from afar, very much moved at all that he recalled to him; but Hettéma received him with hardly concealed ill-humor. "You here! — I rather think we have just cursed you this week! — we who went to the country to live in peace —"

And on the doorstep, while finishing his pipe he told him that on the previous Sunday they had

invited Fanny to dinner at their house as well as the child whose outing day it was, to distract her a little from her melancholy thoughts. In fact, the dinner passed cheerfully enough, she even sang for them a piece of music at dessert; then they separated toward ten o'clock, and they were getting ready to go to bed delightedly, when all of a sudden there was a knocking on the shutters and little Josaph's voice calling wildly:

"Come quickly, mamma wants to poison herself——" Hettéma rushed, arrived in time to snatch the laudanum bottle from her by force. It had been necessary to struggle, to seize her by the waist, to hold her up and to defend himself against the blows of her head, the blows of her comb with which she disfigured his countenance. In the struggle, the bottle was broken, the laudanum spilled all around, and there was nothing else but garments stained and infected with poison. "But you understand clearly what such scenes, all that drama of various doings are for quiet people—— And so it is over, I have given notice, next month I move——" He put his pipe in its

case, and with a quiet peaceful adieu, disappeared under the low archway of a small court, leaving Gaussin quite upset by what he had just heard.

He pictured to himself the scene in that room which had been their room, the fright of the little fellow calling for aid, the brutal struggle with the stout man, and he thought he tasted the opiate flavor, the drowsy bitterness of the spilled laudanum. Its terror remained with him all day, aggravated by the thought of the isolation which she was about to experience. The Hettémas having left, who would restrain her hand from a fresh attempt?

A letter came to reassure him somewhat. Fanny thanked him for not being so hard as he wished to appear, since he still took some interest in the poor forsaken woman: "They have told you, have they not? — I wanted to die —, it was on account of my feeling so lonely! — I tried, I was not able, they stopped me, my hand trembled perhaps —, the fear of suffering, of becoming ugly — Oh! that little Doré, how did she

have the courage? — After the first shame at my having failed, it was a joy to think that I could write to you, love you from afar, see you again; for I do not lose the hope that you will come once, as one comes to an unfortunate friend in a house of mourning, from pity, only from pity."

From that time there came from Chaville every two or three days a capricious correspondence, long, short, a journal of sorrow that he had not the strength to send back and that enlarged in this tender heart the sensitive spot of a pity without love, no longer for the mistress, but for the human being suffering because of him.

One day it was the departure of her neighbors, those witnesses of her past happiness who bore away from her so many reminiscences. At present she had no longer anything to recall them to her but the furniture, the walls of their little house, and the servant-woman, a poor wild beast, as little interested in things as the oriole, all shivering with the winter cold, sadly ruffled in a corner of its cage.

Another day, while a pale ray was disporting on the window-panes, she reawoke all joyous in this belief: He will come to-day! — Why? — nothing, an idea — Immediately she set to making the house beautiful and the woman coquettish with her Sunday dress and the headdress that he liked; then until evening, until the last glimmer of light from the dining-room window, she counted the trains, listened for his coming by way of the Pavé des Gardes — Must she not be mad!

Sometimes nothing but a line: "It is raining, it is dark —, I am alone and I am weeping for you —" Or she was quite satisfied with putting in the envelope a flower all steeped and stiff with rime, the last in their little garden. Better than all the wailings, that flower picked up from under the snow bespoke winter, solitude, desertion; he saw the place at the end of the walk, and against the borders, a woman's petticoat wet to the hem, going and coming in a solitary walk.

That pity that was harrowing his heart made him live again with Fanny, in spite of their

separation. He thought of it, pictured her to himself at every hour; but by a singular failing of memory, though it was hardly more than five or six weeks since their separation, and though the slightest details of their interior were still present to him, from La Balue's cage in front of a wooden cuckoo-clock won at a country fête, even to the hazel branches that the slightest wind made beat against the window-panes of their dressing-room, the woman herself no longer appeared to him distinctly. He saw her in a misty remoteness, with a single detail of her countenance, accentuated and painful, her deformed mouth, her smile spoiled by that missing tooth.

Thus growing old, what was going to become of her, the poor creature by whose side he had slept so long? The money that he had left with her gone, whither would she go, to what depths even descend? And suddenly there arose in his memory the sad street-walker met one evening in an English tavern, dying of thirst over her slice of smoked salmon. She would become such as that, she whose attentions he had so long accepted, as well

as her passionate and faithful tenderness. And that idea made him desperate —— Yet, what was he to do? Because he had had the misfortune of meeting that woman, of living for some time with her, was he condemned to keep her always, to sacrifice his happiness to her? Why he and not the others? In the name of what justice?

While forbidding himself to see her again, he wrote to her; and his designedly practical and dry letters betrayed his emotion under wise and soothing counsel. He asked her to withdraw Josaph from the boarding-school, to take him back so as to occupy herself, to amuse herself; but Fanny refused. What was the use of placing that child in the presence of her sorrow, of her discouragement? It was quite enough on Sunday when the little fellow roamed from chair to chair, wandered from the dining-room to the garden, realizing that a great misfortune had saddened the house, and no longer daring to ask for news of "Papa Jean" since they had told him with sobs that he had gone, that he would not return again:

"All my papas go away, then!"

And this phrase of the abandoned little fellow, falling from a heart-rending letter, remained heavy on Gaussin's heart. Ere long the thought of knowing she was at Chaville so weighed upon him that he advised her to return to Paris so as to mingle with the world. With her sad experience of men and of ruptures, Fanny saw in this offer only a frightful selfishness, the desire to get rid of her forever, by one of those abrupt scoldings with which she was familiar; and she expressed herself about it unreservedly:

"You know what I said to you of old — I will remain your wife in spite of everything, your loving and faithful wife. Our little house encircles me with souvenirs of you, and I would not leave it for anything in the world — What should I do in Paris? I am disgusted with my past life that takes you away; and then, think of what you expose us to — You think yourself quite strong, then? Come, then, you naughty fellow —, only once —"

He did not go there; but, one Sunday, in the afternoon, alone and at work, he heard two gentle

knocks on his door. He jumped, recognized her brisk way of announcing herself as of old. Fearing lest she would find some message below, she went up in a hurry, without asking any questions. He approached, his footfall buried in the carpet, hearing her breathing through the joints of the door:

“Jean, are you there?”

Oh! that humble and broken voice — Once more, not very loud:

“Jean! —” then a sighing moan, the rustling of a letter, and the caress and adieu of a kiss thrown.

Not till she was going slowly down the stairs step by step, as if waiting to be called back, did Jean pick up the letter and open it. They had buried the little Hochecorne girl that morning at the hospital for sick children. She had come with the father and some persons of Chaville, and had not been able to keep herself from going up to see him or to leave these lines written in advance. “—— When I told you so! —— if I resided in Paris, one would see me always on your stairway —— Adieu, my friend, I am going back to our house ——”

And while reading, his eyes misty with tears, he recalled the same scene in the Rue de l'Arcade, the dismissed lover's sorrow, the letter slipped under the door, and Fanny's heartless laugh. She loved him, then, more than he loved Irène! Or is it, indeed, that the man, more mixed up in the battle of business and life than the woman, has not, like her, exclusiveness of love, forgetfulness and indifference as to everything outside her absorbing and unique passion?

That torture, that pain of pity from which he was suffering, was appeased only at Irène's side. Here only, anguish left him, melted only under the soft rays of her blue eyes. There remained to him only a great weariness, a temptation to put his head on her shoulder and to remain there, without speaking, without stirring, protected.

"What ails you?" she said to him — "Are you not happy?"

"Yes, very happy." But why was his happiness made up of so much sadness and of so many tears? And at moments he would have liked to tell her everything, as to a sympathetic and dear friend;

without dreaming, poor fool, of the anxiety that such confidences excite in entirely inexperienced souls, of how incurably they may wound a trusting affection. Ah! if he had been able to carry her off, to fly with her! he felt that it would be the end of his tortures; but old Bouchereau was unwilling to forego an hour of the time fixed upon: "I am old, I am ill — I shall not see my child again, do not deprive me of these last days —"

Under his severe bearing, that great man was the best of men. A hopeless victim of heart disease whose progress he himself followed and recorded, he spoke of it with admirable coolness, continued his courses while suffocating, sounding patients less affected than himself. There was a single weakness in that great mind, distinctly marking the Tourainer's peasant origin: his respect for titles, for the nobility. And the memory of the little turrets of Castelet and of the old name of Armandy had not been without intimate influence on his willingness to accept Jean as his niece's husband.

The marriage would take place at Jean's country home, which would avoid disturbing the poor

mother who sent every week to her future daughter quite a long and very tender letter, dictated to Divonne or to one of the little twins. And it was a sweet joy to him to talk with Irène about his folks, to find Castelet again in the Place Vendôme, all his affections twined around his dear betrothed.

But he was frightened at feeling himself so old, so weary in her presence, at seeing her take a childish pleasure in things that no longer amused him, in the joys of a joint life, already discounted by him. Thus the list to be prepared of everything that they would have to take to the consulate, furniture and stuffs to be chosen, a list in the middle of which he stopped one evening, with hesitating pen, frightened at the return he was making toward the installation in the Rue d'Amsterdam, and at the inevitable recommencement of so many sweet joys exhausted, ended by those five years passed with a woman, in a travesty of marriage and of housekeeping.



XIV

"Yes, my dear fellow, died to-night in Rosa's arms —— I have just taken it to the taxidermist's."

De Potter, the musician, whom Jean met as he was leaving a shop in the Rue du Bac, clung to him under the stress of an effusiveness which was hardly consistent with his impassive and severe features of a man of business, and related to him the martyrdom of poor Bichito killed by the Parisian winter, shriveled up with cold in spite of layers of wadding and the alcohol lamp lighted for two months past under its little nest, as is done with prematurely born children. Nothing could have prevented it from shivering, and the night before, whilst they were all around it, a last trembling shook it from head to tail; it died like a good Christian, thanks to the dashes of holy water which, when life was vanishing in changing colors, in prismatic movements,

Mamma Pilar poured on its rough skin while saying, with her eyes towards heaven: *Dios loui pardonne !*

"I laugh at it, but my heart is full all the same; especially when I think of the sorrow of my poor Rosa whom I left in tears —— Fortunately Fanny was by her side ——"

"Fanny?"

"Yes, it was quite a time since we had seen her —— She arrived this morning just in the midst of the drama, and that good girl remained to console her friend." He added, without noticing the impression caused by his words: "It is ended, then? You are no longer together? —— You recall our conversation at the Enghien lake? At least, you take advantage of the lessons that one gives you ——" And he put a touch of envy into his approval.

Gaussin, his brow knitted, felt a veritable uneasiness in thinking that Fanny had returned to Rosario's; but he was angry with himself for this weakness, having no longer, after all, either right or responsibility over that life.

De Potter stopped in front of a house in the Rue de Beaune, a very ancient street of the former aristocratic Paris, into which they had just entered. It was there that he dwelt, or that he thought he dwelt, for appearance's sake, for the world, but really his time was spent in the Avenue de Villiers or at Enghien, and he made only occasional appearances at the conjugal domicile to keep his wife and child from seeming too much abandoned.

Jean was pursuing his way, planning an adieu, but the other kept hold of his hand in his long, hard hands, hardened by keyboard exercise, and, without the least embarrassment, like a man whom vice no longer embarrasses, said :

"Do me a service, then —, come up with me. I was to dine with my wife to-day, but I cannot really leave my poor Rosa all alone in her despair — You will serve as a pretext for my going out and will save me from a wearisome explanation."

The composer's study, in superb and cold middle-class apartments on the third floor, bespoke the neglect of a room not used for work. Everything

there was too neat, without anything of the disorder, of the little feverish restlessness that appears in objects and furniture. Not a book, not a sheet on the table which was majestically dominated by an enormous inkstand in bronze, dry and shining as in a show window; nor the least part-song on the old spinet-shaped piano by which his first works had been inspired. And a white marble bust, the bust of a young woman with delicate features, with an expression of gentleness, quite pale in the declining daylight, made still colder the fireplace without a fire and draped, and seemed to look sadly on the walls loaded with gilded and beribboned crowns, medals, and commemorative frames, quite a glorious and vain allowance generously left to the wife as compensation, and which she cherished as the funeral ornaments of her happiness.

Scarcely had they entered, when the study door was opened again, and Madame de Potter appeared:

“It is you, Gustave?”

She thought he was alone, and finding herself in the presence of a stranger, stopped, in evident confusion. Elegant and pretty, of refined taste in dress,

she seemed more refined than her bust, her gentle expression changed into a courageous and nervous resolve. In the world, opinions were divided about a woman of that character. Some blamed her for enduring the open disdain of her husband, that other establishment, known, maintained; others, on the contrary, admired her silent resignation. And in the general opinion she was considered a quiet person, liking her ease above everything, finding compensations sufficient for her widowhood in the caresses of a pretty child and the joy of bearing a great man's name.

But whilst the composer was introducing his companion and was retailing some lie or other so as to escape the family dinner, at the sudden emotion of that young womanly countenance, at the fixedness of that look which betrayed that she no longer saw, and no longer heard, as if absorbed in suffering, Jean could see for himself that under that worldly exterior a great living sorrow was being buried. She appeared to accept that story which she did not believe, and was satisfied with saying, gently :

"Raymond will cry, I had promised him that we would dine beside his bed."

"How is he?" asked De Potter, absorbed, impatient.

"Better, but he is always coughing — You do not come to see him?"

He stammered some words in his mustache, feigning to look around the room: "Not now —, very much hurried —, meeting at the club at six o'clock —" What he wanted to avoid was being alone with her.

"Adieu, then," remarked the young woman, suddenly appeased, her features in repose, like pure water that has just been disturbed by a stone going to its bottom. She bowed, and disappeared.

"Let us be off! —"

And De Potter, thus freed, drew Gaussin away, the latter looking at that sinister man of passion going down in front of him, stiff and correct in his long, tight overcoat of English cut, so much moved when he was carrying his mistress's chameleon to be stuffed, and leaving without embracing his sick child.

"All that, my dear fellow," remarked the composer as if in reply to his friend's thought, "is the fault of those who made me get married. A real service that they did me in that respect as well as that poor woman! — What a folly to want to make a husband and a father of me! — I was Rosa's lover, I have so remained, I will remain so until one of us dies — Does one ever get rid of a vice that has taken hold of you at the right moment, that indeed keeps hold of you? — And as for yourself, are you sure that if Fanny had wished? —" He hailed an empty hack that was passing, and said on getting into it:

"In reference to Fanny, you know the news? — Flamant has been pardoned, has left Mazas — It was Déchelette's petition — Poor Déchelette! he will have done good even after his death."

Motionless, with a wild desire to run, to catch up with those wheels that were jolting at full speed in the dark street in which the gas was being lighted, Gaussin was astonished at feeling himself so much moved. "Flamant pardoned —, left Mazas —" he repeated these words quite low, seeing in them

the reason for Fanny's silence for some days past, for her suddenly interrupted lamentations, hushed under the caresses of a consoler ; for the first thought of the wretch who was at last free must have been for her.

He recalled the tender correspondence dated from the prison, his mistress's obstinacy in defending that man only, when she made so little of the others ; and instead of congratulating himself on an adventure that logically discharged him from all uneasiness, from all remorse, an indefinable anguish kept him awake and feverish for a part of the night. Why ? He no longer loved her ; he was thinking only of his letters which remained in that woman's hands, which she would perhaps read to the other man, and which—who knows ?—under an evil influence she might one day make use of to disturb his rest, his happiness.

True or false, or concealing without suspecting it, some care of another sort, that concern about his letters decided him to take an imprudent step, to make the visit to Chaville that he had always obstinately refused. But to whom confide a mission so secret and so delicate ? — One morning in

February he took the ten o'clock train, very calm in mind and heart, with the single fear of finding the house closed, the woman already gone in attendance on her outlaw.

From the turn of the road, the open slats, the curtains at the cottage windows reassured him; and remembering his emotion, when he saw vanishing behind him the faint light that flecked the shadow, he bantered himself upon the weakness of his impressions. It was no longer the same man who was passing that way, and certainly he would no longer find the same woman. It was, however, but two months since then. The woods that skirted the railroad had not taken on new leaves, but had kept the same leprosy of rust as on the day of the rupture and of her echoing clamor.

He got off alone at the station, in that penetrating and cold fog, took the little country road quite slippery with hardened snow, the railroad arch, and met no one before reaching the Pavé des Gardes, at the turning of which there appeared a man and a child followed by an employee from the station, pushing his barrow loaded with trunks.

The child, all enveloped in a muffler, his cap down over his ears, restrained a cry as he was passing close to him. "But it is Josaph ——," he said to himself, somewhat astonished and sad at that ingratitude on the part of the little fellow; and turning round, he met the look of the man who was accompanying the child while holding him by the hand. That intelligent and fine countenance, made pale by being shut up in a cell, those ready-made garments bought the day before, that stubbly blond beard, which had not had time to grow since leaving Mazas —— Flamant, zounds! And Josaph was his son ——

It was a revelation in a flash. He saw again, he understood everything, from the letter in the box, in which the handsome engraver confided to his mistress a child whom he had in the country, to the little fellow's mysterious arrival, and Hettéma's embarrassed countenance when speaking of that adoption, and Fanny's looks to Olympe; for they had all conspired together to make him support the forger's child. Oh! what a fine ninny, and how they must have laughed! A disgust seized him for

all that past of shame, a desire to flee afar; but things were troubling him that he would have liked to know. The man and the child having left, why not she? And then his letters, he must have his letters, leave nothing of his in that corner of pollution and misfortune.

“Madame? — Here is monsieur! —”

“Monsieur who? —” unaffectedly asked a voice from the farther end of the room.

“I —”

A cry was heard, a sudden bound, and then: “Wait, I am getting up —, I am coming —”

Still in bed and it was after midday! Jean clearly suspected why, he knew the causes of those exhaustions, those lassitudes of the morning; and while he was waiting in the dining-room observing the slightest of its familiar articles, listening to the whistle of the up-going train, the trembling bleat of a she-goat in a neighboring garden, the scattered service on the table carried him back to the mornings of old, the little hasty breakfast before leaving.

Fanny entered with a bound toward him; then, stopping in the presence of his coldness, they remained for a second astonished, hesitating, as when one finds one's self again after those intimacies broken off, on each side of a broken bridge, the distance of bank to bank from each other, and between them the immense space of the rolling and swallowing waves.

"Good-day ——," she said in a low voice, without budging.

She found him changed, grown pale. He was astonished at seeing her again so young, only a little stouter, less tall than he pictured her to himself, but bathed in that special radiance, that brightness of her complexion and of her eyes, that fresh meadow-like sweetness that remained with her after nights of great caressings. She had, then, remained in the wood, at the bottom of the ravine encumbered with dead leaves, she, the memory of whom was gnawing him with pity.

"People rise late in the country ——," he remarked in an ironical tone.

She excused herself, pretending a headache, and, like him, used impersonal forms, not knowing how to say either thou or you; then to the mute questioning that pointed out to her the meal not yet cleared away: "It was the child ——, he breakfasted there this morning before going away ——"

"Going away? —— Where, then?"

His lips expressed supreme indifference, but the flash of his eyes betrayed him. And Fanny said:

"His father has appeared again ——, he has come to take him ——"

"On leaving Mazas, is it not?"

She started, but did not try to lie.

"Well, yes, —— I had promised, I did it —— How often the desire seized me to tell it to you, but I dared not; I was afraid that you would send him away, the poor little fellow ——" And she added timidly: "You were so jealous ——"

He laughed heartily, disdainfully. He jealous, and of that convict ——, come, then! —— And feeling his wrath rise, he cut short, and told quickly what brought him. His letters! ——

Why had she not given them to Césaire, that would have obviated this interview that was painful to both.

"It is true," she said, still very gentle, "but I am going to give them back to you, they are there ——"

He followed her into the room, noticed the untidy bed, the two pillows covered in haste, breathed that odor of burnt cigarettes, mingled with a woman's toilet perfumes, which he recognized, as well as the little mother-of-pearl box laid on the table. And the same thought came to both. "They are not very heavy," she said as she opened the box ——, "we should not risk much by throwing them into the fire ——"

He was silent, troubled, his mouth dry, hesitating to approach that violated bed, in front of which she was turning over the letters for the last time, her head bent, her nape solid and white under the twisted masses of her hair, and in her floating woollen garment, her figure seemed stouter and flabby, uncared for ——

"There! —— They are all there."

Having taken the package and put it hurriedly into his pocket, for his preoccupations had changed, Jean asked :

“Then he is taking his child away? — Whither are they going? —”

“To Morvan, into his own country, to conceal himself, to do his engraving there and send it to Paris under a fictitious name.”

“And you? — Do you purpose to remain here? —”

She turned away her eyes so as to escape him, stammering that it would be very lonely. And so she thought —, she would go away, perhaps, ere long — on a little journey.

“To Morvan, no doubt? — To her family! —” And letting his jealous fury loose: “Admit, then, at once, that you will rejoin your thief, that you are going to set up house-keeping — It is quite a long time that you have desired it. Come. Return to your sty — Harlot and forger go well together; I was very good to want to take you out of that mire.”

She kept her motionless muteness, a flash of triumph filtrated between her downcast eyelids. And the more he lashed her with ferocious, outrageous irony, the prouder she seemed, and she emphasized the trembling in the corner of her mouth. Now he spoke of his own happiness, his honest and young love, his only love. Oh! what a gentle pillow to sleep on is an honest woman's heart — Then, abruptly, his voice lowered, as if he were ashamed :

"I have just met your Flamant, he spent the night here?"

"Yes, he was late, it was snowing — A bed was made for him on the divan."

"You lie, he slept there —, one has only to see the bed, to look at you."

"And what then?" She brought her face close to his, her large gray eyes lit up with libertine flames — "Did I know that you would come? — And you lost, what could anything else matter to me? I was sad, alone, disgusted —"

"And then the prison beard! — Since the time that you lived with an honest man —, it

seemed good to you, eh? — Was it necessary to surfeit yourself with those caresses? — Ah! filth — see —”

She saw the blow coming without avoiding it, received it straight in the face, then with a dull murmur of pain, of joy, of victory, she jumped on him, clasped him full in her arms: “My dear, my dear —, you still love me —,” and they rolled together on the bed.

The loud noise of a passing express woke him up with a start toward evening; and with his eyes open, he remained for some moments without realizing where he was, all alone in the bottom of that large bed in which his members, wearied as if by excessive walking, seemed to be placed beside each other, without joint or energy. During the afternoon, much snow had fallen. In a desert-like silence one heard it melt and trickle down the walls, along the window-panes, drop on the ridges of the roof, and, at moments, on the coke fire in the fireplace on which it was splashing.

Where was he? What was he doing there? Gradually, in the reflection from the little garden, the room appeared to him quite white, lit up from below, Fanny's large portrait set up in front of him, and the memory of his fall returned to him, without the least astonishment. As soon as he stood before that bed, he felt himself ensnared again, lost; those clothes drew him as into a whirlpool, and he said to himself: "If I fall into it, it will be without remission, and forever." It was done; and under the sad disgust of his cowardice, there was, as it were, a comforting in the idea that he would not again emerge from that filth, the pitiful happiness of the wounded man who, losing his blood, dragging his wound, has stretched himself on a heap of dung to die there, and weary of suffering, of struggling, all his veins open, sinks delightfully into the soft and fetid warmth.

What remained to him to do now was horrible, but very simple. To return to Irène after this treason, to risk a housekeeping after the De Potter fashion? — Low as he had fallen, he had not yet come to that — He was going to write to

Bouchereau, to the great physiologist who was the first to study and describe the maladies of the will, to submit a terrible case of it to him, the history of his life since his first meeting with that woman when she had laid her hand on his arm, until the day when, thinking himself saved, full of happiness, full of intoxication, she held him again by the magic of the past, that horrible past in which love held so small a place, and only cowardly habit and vice had entered into his bones ——

The door opened. Fanny walked quite gently into the room so as not to awaken him. From between his closed eyelids he was looking at her, alert and strong, rejuvenated, at the fire warming her feet steeped in snow in the garden, and from time to time turning toward him with the gentle smile that she had in the morning, in the dispute. She came to take the package of "Maryland" from its customary place, rolled a cigarette and was moving away, but he held her back.

"You are not asleep, then?"

"No ——, sit down there ——, and let us chat."

She remained on the edge of the bed, a little surprised at that gravity.

"Fanny —— We are going to leave."

She thought at first that he was joking so as to try her. But the very precise details that he gave, speedily undeceived her. There was a position vacant, that of Arica; and he would ask for it. It was a matter of a fortnight, just time enough to get the trunks ready ——

"And your marriage?"

"Not a word more about that —— What I have done is irreparable —— I see clearly that it is ended, I shall no more be able to separate from you."

"Poor baby!" she remarked with a sad sweetness, somewhat contemptuous. Then she said, after having drawn two or three whiffs:

"It is far away, that country of which you speak?"

"Arica? —— very far off, in Peru ——" And quite low: "Flamant will not be able to join you ——"

She remained dreamy and mysterious in her cloud of tobacco. He was still holding her hand, was rubbing her bare arm, and lulled by the trickling of the water all around the little house, he closed his eyes and gently sank into the mire.



XV

Nervous and in trepidation, under steam, already on the start like all those who are eager for departure, Gaussin has for two days been at Marseilles, where Fanny is to come to join him and embark with him. Everything is ready, the berths secured, two first-class cabins for the vice-consul at Arica traveling with his sister-in-law; and there he is pacing the discolored floor of the hotel room, in the feverish double expectation of his mistress and of setting sail.

He had to walk and be agitated there, since he dared not go out. The street embarrassed him as it would a criminal or a deserter, the Marseilles street with its miscellaneous and swarming crowd, where it seems to him that at each turn his father or old Bouchereau is going to appear, to put his hand on his shoulder so as to lay hold of him and take him back.

He shuts himself up, eats there without even going down to the table-d'hôte, reads without fixing his attention, throws himself on his bed, distracting his vague siestas with the views of *The Wreck of La Pérouse* and the *Death of Captain Cook* hanging on the walls, soiled with fly spots, and for whole hours leans his elbows on the worm-eaten wooden balcony, sheltered by a yellow spring blind with as many patches as the sail of a fishing-boat.

His hotel, *The Hotel of the Younger Anarcharsis*, the name of which was taken by chance from the directory and tempted him when he agreed upon the meeting with Fanny, is an old inn by no means luxurious or even very clean, which looks out on the port, on the open sea, in the direction of his voyage. Under its windows, perroquets, cockatoos, birds of the isles with gentle, interminable warbling, all the display in the open air of a bird-dealer, whose closely-packed cages salute the dawn with the noise of a virgin forest, confused and dominated in proportion as the day advances, by the noisy works of the harbor, regulated by the tolling of Notre-Dame de la Garde

There is a confusion of oaths in all languages, of boatmen's cries, of porters, of shell dealers, between the hammer blows at the refitting basin, the creaking of the cranes, the sonorous reverberation of the scales rebounding on the pavement, coast bells, whistling engines, rhythmical noises of pumps and of capstans, bilge-water discharged, escaping steam, all that noise doubled and re-echoed by the surge of the neighboring sea, from which ascends at long intervals the hoarse moaning, the sound as of the breathing of a marine monster of a large transatlantic steamer that is going out to sea.

And the odors also call up far-off countries, quays with more sunshine and still warmer than this; the sandalwood and logwood that are being unloaded, lemons, oranges, pistachio-nuts, beans, groundnuts, whose bitter scent is freed, mounts with clouds of exotic dust into an atmosphere saturated with brackish water, with burnt herbs, with smoking cook-house fats.

Evening having come, these noises die out, these surcharges of the air fall and are evaporated; and whilst Jean, reassured by the shade, the spring

blind raised, looks at the harbor asleep and dark, with its tracery of masts, yard-arms and bowsprits, while the silence is penetrated only by the plashing of an oar, by the distant barking of a dog on shore, and on the deep, out on the deep, the Planier lighthouse, in revolving, projects a long red or white flame that tears the shadow, shows in a flash of light, outlines of isles, forts and rocks. And that luminous look guiding thousands of lives on the horizon is still the voyage that invites him and makes a sign to him, calls him in the voice of the wind, the rollings of the open sea, and the hoarse clamor of a steamboat that ever rattles and puffs at some point of the roadstead.

Twenty-four hours more of waiting ; Fanny is to join him only on Sunday. Those three days to elapse before the meeting he ought to spend with his folks, give them to the dearly beloved whom he will not see again for several years, whom perhaps he will not meet again ; but on the evening of his arrival at Castelet, when his father knew that the marriage was broken off and that he saw into its

causes, an explanation, violent and terrible, took place.

What, then, are we, what are our most tender affections, those nearest to our heart, that a wrath which passes between two beings of the same flesh, of the same blood, snatches, twists, carries off their tenderness, the natural sentiments with roots so deep and so fine, with the blind, irresistible violence of one of those typhoons of the Chinese seas which the most hardy sailors shudder at remembering and of which they say while growing pale: "Let us not speak of it ——"

He will never speak of it, but he will remember all his life that horrible scene on the Castelet terrace where his happy youth was spent, in sight of that splendid and calm horizon, those pines, those myrtles, those cypresses which clustered motionless and trembling around the paternal malediction. Forever will he see that tall old man, with cheeks convulsed and palpitating, advancing on him with that mouth expressing hatred, that look of hatred, uttering words that are never pardoned, driving him from home and from honor: "Go, depart with your

vile creature, you are dead to us! ——” And the little twins crying, crawling on their knees on the stone steps, asking pardon for their big brother, and Divonne’s paleness, without a look, without an adieu, whilst up there, behind the window-panes, the gentle and anxious countenance of the patient was asking why all that noise and why her Jean was going away so quickly and without embracing her.

That idea that he had not embraced his mother made him return when he was half-way to Avignon; he left Césaire with the carriage in the heart of the country, cut across the fields and penetrated into Castelet through the enclosure, like a thief. The night was dark; his steps were impeded by the dead vines, and at last he could no longer find his way, looking for his house in the darkness, already a stranger at his own home. The whiteness of the rough-cast walls at last guided him with their dim reflection; but the front door was closed, the windows everywhere dark. To ring, to call? He dared not, from fear of his father. Two or three times he went around the house, hoping to find entrance

through an imperfectly closed shutter. Everywhere Divonne's lamp had passed as was customary each evening; and after a long look at his mother's room, his heart's adieu to his childhood's home, now also repelling him, he flees in despair with a remorse that never again leaves him.

Ordinarily, for these long absences, these journeyings amid the dangerous chances of sea and wind, relatives and friends prolong their adieus until the final embarkation; they spend the last day together, they visit the boat and the exile's cabin, the better to follow him on his journey. Several times a day, Jean saw passing in front of the hotel those affectionate escorts, sometimes numerous and noisy; but he was especially interested in a family group on the floor below his own. An old man and an old woman, country folks of easy means, in cloth jacket and yellow cambric, have come with their boy, attending him until the departure of the packet; and leaning at their window in the idleness of waiting, all three of them were seen, holding one another by the arm, the sailor between them,

pressed quite close. They are not speaking, they are embracing.

While looking at them Jean is thinking of the fine departure that he might have had — His father, his little sisters, and, leaning on him with a gentle, trembling hand, she whose quick mind and adventurous soul the ships heading to the sea were drawing on — Barren regrets! The crime is perpetrated, his fate on its march, he has only to leave and to forget —

How slow and cruel the hours of the last night seemed to him! He turned and turned again in his hotel bed, spied the dawn on the window with slow variations from dark to gray, then to the morning whiteness that the light-house still spotted with a red spark until effaced by the rising sun.

Then only did he go to sleep, to be suddenly re-awakened by a sprinkling of rays into his room, the confused cries from the bird-dealer's cages and with the innumerable bells of a Marseilles Sunday, spread along the extended quays, all machinery at rest, and great flags floating on the masts — Ten

o'clock already! And the Paris express arrives at noon; quickly he dresses in order to go and meet his mistress; they will breakfast in front of the sea, then their baggage will be carried on board, and, at five o'clock, the signal.

A marvelous day, a deep sky on which the seagulls pass in white specks, the sea of a deeper blue, of a mineral blue, on which, at the horizon, are sails and smoke, everything is visible, everything is mirrored, and everything is dancing; and how natural the song of those sunny banks with transparencies of atmosphere and of water; under the hotel windows harps strike up an Italian air of divine cadence, but whose note, pinched and drawn out on the strings, cruelly tortures the nerves. It is more than music, it is the winged translation of those light-hearted joys of the South, the abundance of life and of love swelling to tears. And the memory of Irène passes into the melody, vibrating and weeping. How far it is! — What a fine country lost, what a regret forever of the things broken off, irreparable!

Come!

On the threshold, as he is going out, Jean meets a boy: "A letter for the Consul —— It came this morning, but the Consul was so sound asleep!" Travellers of distinction are rare at the *Jeune Anacharsis Hôtel*; and so the good people of Marseilles on every occasion proclaim the title of their boarder —— Who could be writing to him? No one knew his address, except Fanny —— And looking more closely at the envelope, he is frightened, he understands.

"Well, no! I am not going away; it is too great a folly, for which I feel I have not the strength. For such enterprises, my poor dear, one needs the youth that I no longer have, or the blindness of a mad passion that is lacking in both. Five years ago, in the happy times, a sign from you would have made me follow you to the ends of the earth, for you cannot deny that I loved you passionately. I gave you all that I had; and when it was necessary to tear myself away from you I suffered, as never for any man. But such a love as that wears out, you see —— To feel you so handsome, so young, always trembling, so many things to defend! —— Now I can do it no longer, you have shown me too much of life, made me suffer too much, I am exhausted.

“In these conditions, the prospect of that long voyage, of that breaking up of home life, makes me afraid. I, who so greatly dislike moving, and who have never gone farther than Saint-Germain, think you! And then women grow old too quickly in the sun, and you would not yet be thirty when I should be sere and worn out like Mamma Pilar; it is because of the blow that you would inflict on me for your sacrifice and because poor Fanny would pay for everybody. Listen, there is a country in the East, I have so read in a number of your *Tour du Monde*, where, when a woman deceives her husband, she is sewed up alive with a cat, in the skin of a newly-flayed beast, and then the package is dropped on the surging and bounding sea in a broiling sun. The woman mews, the cat scratches, both devour each other while the skin becomes shrivelled and tightens on that horrible battle between captives, until the last death-rattle, until the last palpitation of the bag. This is somewhat like the punishment that was awaiting us together ——”

He stopped for a minute, crushed, stupid. As far as the eye could reach, the blue of the sea was sparkling. *Addio* ——, sang the harps, to which was added a voice warm and passionate as they —— *Addio* —— And the nothingness of his ruined,

ravaged life, all made up of wreckage and of tears, appeared to him, as a bare field, as harvests gathered without a hope of return, and for that woman who was escaping from him ——

“I ought to have said that sooner, but I dared not, seeing you so exalted, so resolute. Your exaltation carried me away; then a woman’s vanity, the very natural pride of having conquered you again after the rupture. Only in the very innermost of my being I felt that something was no longer there, something had ended, had burst. How could it be helped? after such shocks —— And do not picture to yourself that it is because of that unfortunate Flamant. For him as for you and all the others, it is ended, my heart is dead; but there remains this child whom I can no longer do without and who brings me back to its father, the poor man who ruined himself for love and who returned to me from Mazas as fervent and tender as at our first meeting. Picture to yourself how, when we saw each other again, he spent the whole night weeping on my shoulder; you see that there was hardly any reason for you to become so excited ——

“I have told you so, my dear boy, I have loved too much, I am broken down. At present I need some one to love me in my turn, fondle me, admire me, and lull

me. He will be on his knees, will never see me with wrinkles or with white hair; and if he marries me, as he intends to do, it is I who will do him a favor. Compare — Above all, no follies. My precautions have been taken so that you cannot find me again. From the little station café in which I am writing to you, I see through the trees the house where we have had such delightful and such cruel moments, and the sign hanging on the door awaiting new guests — Behold you free, you will never again hear me spoken of — Adieu, a kiss, the last, on the neck —, my dear one —”









